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Illustration: KEG

骸骨騎士様

異世界

お出掛け

VIII

*Skeleton Knight,
going out to
the parallel universe*



Skeleton Knight

vol.07: United Front

by Hakari Enki

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「なんで私とアークが夫婦なんて話が出てくるのよ!」

アリアン

アーク

骸骨騎士様、異世界へお出掛け VII

Canke Hakuori 秤 猿鬼

illust. KeG





「もおちよおつといくでええ!!」

フェルフィヴァイスロツテ



Prologue

The Southwestern region of the Northern Continent. Nozan Kingdom, one of the four countries that occupied the area.

In the north, there was the Delfuento Kingdom. In the south, there was the Salma Kingdom. To the west, there was the Hiruku Theocracy. Surrounded by these three countries, Nozan Kingdom was currently facing a life-and-death struggle for its very survival.

On a certain day, Nozan Kingdom's capital, Soulia, had been attacked by an army of one hundred thousand undead and forced it into a siege battle.

Against the never before seen number of tireless undead.

One of the main gates of the city's outer wall, which was essential to maintaining the front line, had been breached on the dawn of the seventh day.

King Asparuf Nozan Soulia had immediately ordered his forces to retreat behind the inner wall once he learned of the breach.

The old city district rested behind the inner wall, which acted as the residential area for the nobility and the upper class, but it had been converted into a shelter for those evacuated from the new city district, most of whom slept in the streets.

Many of the capital's citizens nervously watched the inner wall as they listened to the battle taking place beyond it.

Other evacuees sought refuge in the majestic Hiruku church that had been built near the center of the old town, and wholeheartedly prayed for God's salvation.

The oppressive tension washed over everyone gathered in the building like a wave, but the smile and encouragement of a man dressed in extravagant robes managed to ease their worries somewhat.

The man with the neatly trimmed black hair and who was leading the prayer

was Palermo Avaritia Liberalitas, one of the seven cardinals of the Hiruku religion.

Despite being one of the highest ranking members of the Hiruku church, he gently spoke the teaching of God in the time when the people needed it the most.

However, that was only his public face.

(Hahaha, what is this. The stench of a concerned beast clings to these people..... I eagerly await the moment desperation consumes the last shred of hope in their eyes, watching as it gradually infects one after another. Truly the most delectable of experiences.....)

On the inside, Cardinal Palermo relished in the twisted pleasure he received from witnessing the suffering of others.

He was at the peak of supreme bliss within this place.

But his pleasure was abruptly brought to an end.

Outside of Soulia's city wall..... a huge pillar of light suddenly rose into the sky where the majority of the undead had gathered, and a magic formation appeared in the sky shortly after.

Despite being hidden behind the wall, the entire city was enveloped by the blinding light, every head turning towards the source once the light faded.

The enormous magic formation in the sky shot a pillar of scorching flames towards the ground as a giant figure could be seen emerging from within the fire..... from the citizen's standpoint it obvious that a divine being had descended.

The being in the sky was covered in a flame cloak and six magnificent wings were spread behind its back.

Just like the heavenly messengers of myth, the being wore vermilion full body armor, carried a feather-like shield in one hand and a crimson sword in the other.

.....An angel.

Divinity, an existence of fierce power..... the energy it gave off shock the sky itself and sent the people into a state of awe as their gaze remained skyward.

An angel had appeared in a land tormented by an undead horde..... from this side, it seemed as if God had responded to their prayers.

However, in the face of the absolute existence, people felt that such a being hadn't simply been sent to relieve the worries of those below.

Those that had gathered around the church felt their fear vanish immediately, they lowered their heads towards the angel and began to pray or seek forgiveness for past transgressions.

Only one man remained standing as he such a spectacle unfolded before him.

(Wha-What.....? An angel..... that's ridiculous!!)

Cardinal Palermo's entire body trembled as he shook his head and scolded himself in an attempt to deny reality.

"Angels in this world..... God doesn't even exist!! That is something different!!)

The people surrounding him were too busy paying reverence to notice that Cardinal Palermo was baring his teeth at the angel.

On the other side of the outer wall, the angel gradually began to shrink until it disappeared from view.

Silence fell over the city.....

The next moment..... screams filled the air as fire and waves of heat burnt through the area beyond the wall.

Cardinal Palermo became blue in the face as the sounds of battle echoed through the air.

(What's happening!? My minions' signatures..... are disappearing one after another!?)

Palermo glared in the direction the angel disappeared in while struggling to suppress his haggard breathing.

The Pope's personally created undead, the forces he'd been entrusted with.

The spider-humanoid ghost knights that had been made to control the forces..... Palermo became greatly upset as hundreds, no thousands of those connections were severed.

(That false angel!! It's destroying my undead soldiers and ghost knights!! Why, why has such an existence appeared now of all times!? To save the people? Ridiculous!)

Palermo groaned as a headache struck him, his rationality could barely keep up with the reality before his eyes.

Even as all the connections the Pope himself had implanted into him continued to disappear, the Cardinal shook his head and took a labored step in the direction the angel causing all of this had appeared.

(A force capable of bringing this capital to its knees was destroyed in a matter of moments. Even if it's by my own hands, I must find the source behind all of this and eliminate it.....)

Cardinal Palermo ground his teeth as he weaved his way through the people prostrating themselves in the street. The irritation at knowing the other cardinals were carrying out the Pope's invasion unimpeded carrying him forward.



Soulia, Nozan Kingdom's capital, old town district.

The noise of the people still fleeing to the safe haven behind the inner wall overpowered the diminishing sounds of combat.

Meanwhile, within the confines of a cubical tower near the wall where he and his advisors had gathered, King Asparuf Nozan Soulia released a deep sigh.

The undead had managed to breach the outer wall on the seventh day of the siege, and Nozan's fate was in a precarious state.

King Asparuf's shoulders slumped as he cast a glance outside a small window..... as his eyes wandered towards the destroyed southern gate, it happened without warning.

A blinding light many times more powerful than sunlight filtered through the small window, the moment the king looked outside.

“Wh-What!? What's happening!?”

However, no one in the room could answer the King's question, everyone had covered their eyes when the light entered the dusty room.

The light illuminated the entire dusty room before dimming, even as they reoriented themselves, the source of the light couldn't be found outside the window.

When he looked back he saw that his ministers and generals speculating amongst themselves what that light might have been.

Even though he tried to locate the cause, it seemed to have originated beyond the outer wall.

However, the troops had already been ordered to withdraw from the outer wall.

Undead would be flowing through the breach, even if he deployed a unit to investigate, he would only be sending them to their deaths.

However, everyone began holding their breath when the sounds of battle beyond the outer wall flared up again.

Though he knew that something was going on, he just didn't know what..... the fact that he couldn't investigate frustrated him to no end.

King Asparuf could feel the tension of everyone in the room rise, but he couldn't think of anything to say that would ease their worries.

The wrinkles between his eyebrows deepened as the king clenched his fist on the window sill, but everyone's eyes snapped towards the breathless young soldier who suddenly burst into the room.

“R-, Re-, Report! The undead around the outer wall..... an angel appeared!”

The scatter shot words of the messenger the general, who proceeded to reprimand him for it..

“Imbecilic! You are in the King’s presence, speak clearly!”

The messenger straightened his posture and saluted the general before apologizing.

“I am sorry! Reporting! An unidentified cavalry unit was spotted outside the outer wall, and a single rider charged at the undead army! At the same time, a supposed angel descended upon the battlefield and began exterminating the undead!”

Everyone, including the king himself, turned to one another to see if they’d heard the messenger’s report correctly.

The general who had reprimanded the messenger was the first to speak up.

“Wha-What was that report!? How could you come here saying such nonsense as “an angel” descending!?”

Although the messenger flinched when confronted by the general’s yell, he regained his posture and reaffirmed the contents of his report.

“That is correct! Most of the city witnessed the angel’s descent! By the time I was sent to give this report, the angel had exterminated a third of the undead horde!”

Some the the country’s leaders could not believe their ears as they listened to the young man’s words, but those who could discovered a ray of hope in their bleakest hour.

King Asparuf glanced outside the window, closed his eyes and smiled as he realized the source of the light from before.

“It’s as the Cardinal said, God really has blessed us.....”

The king let out sigh of admiration and relief while thinking about what had

occurred beyond the wall.

If the messenger was speaking the truth, then Nozan had been saved on the brink of destruction and given a ray of hope. However, the king's smile turned bitter and shook his head as concern for the princes set to obtain reinforcements and the princess entered his mind.

(The situation is still too unstable to start celebrating now.....)

As if it were a self-fulfilling prophecy, another breathless messenger burst into the room.

“A large amount of undead managed to enter the city through the outer wall's breach!”

The king nodded his head and turned his gaze toward the people around him.

“Hasten the evacuation into the old city district! General, take charge of the retreating troops and intercept the undead! As the previous report stated, there's no way for them to take Soulia now! Clear that filth out of our city!”

Everyone saluted at the king's orders and immediately sprung into action.

Once more, King Asparuf clenched his fist and glanced at the section of the city he could see beyond the wall.

Regardless of what the angel's appearance meant, if they did nothing Nozan could still collapse.

While there was a food warehouse within the old city district, the majority of their resources were stored within the new city district. Now that the outer wall has been breached by the undead, the provisions had to be procured as soon as possible.

The King prayed to God and the angel he'd sent that his troops returning to the battle would be treated mercifully.

Lille, please be safe.

The King had yet to learn that the one whose safety he had prayed for was

already making her way back to the capital.

Chapter 01: Annihilation Knight

Soulia, the capital city of Nozan Kingdom.

A high city wall had been built around the city to defend it from invaders..... sprawling fields, maintained by the city's farmers, once surrounded the wall.

However, the fields had been trampled by the hundred thousand undead that had besieged the city.

The area around the southern gate was surrounded by countless suits of scratched and mangled body armor, a thick layer of ash covered the entire area and flaming pyres sent black smoke into the air.

These were the marks of a recent battle.....

Only a single individual stood in the center on this battle-scarred stretch of land.

He wore a set of ornamental silver armor with white and blue undertones, in his right hand he carried a blue longsword which gave off a pale aura, in his left was an elaborately decorated round shield..... and a jet-black mantle on his back blew in the wind.

“Hmm, maybe..... maybe I went a bit too far.....”

With a deep sigh I voiced my thoughts as I took in the surrounding area.

My original plan was to destroy at least half of the undead with the Heavenly Knight's Area-Of-Effects skills, but this was the end result.

Other than those that had managed to slip into the city before I arrived, the entire horde had been purified, with only the scattered pieces of armor remaining.

The few remaining undead were a good distance away from me, but with their chain of command destroyed, they were just mindlessly wandering around.

There was a clear difference between these undead and the ones I encountered

in Tajiento. While the same power controlled the two undead factions, it was obvious that these ones lacked clear direction.

If I had to guess, I'd say that seven hundred undead remained, but they weren't much of a threat in this condition.

The only problem were those within the capital.

The backlash from using the heavenly knight skill still wrecked my body, but I couldn't just stand here forever.

Following that train of thought, I turned towards Soulia's destroyed gate, but a familiar and kinda sharp female voice behind me halted my step.

"Hold on, Arc. You don't plan to enter the city by yourself, do you?"

Looking back I saw a tall, beautiful woman making her way towards me with long strides.

However, she wasn't human. Her clothes, decorated with a distinct pattern, were wrapped around her voluptuous body, her skin had a lilac hue, and she had golden eyes and pointed ears.

She was what this world referred to as a 'Dark Elf'. Even though she held her sword, whose hilt was decorated with a lion, at waist-level she still approached me while keeping a watchful eye on her surroundings.

"Oh, Ariane-dono. Our end of the bargain is complete."

She was stunned by what I said and shook her head after a moment.

"I only came to scout ahead..... but only the matter of our payment remains."

I couldn't disagree with her statement and started chuckling in a manner unbecoming of this place.

"Hehehe, I overdid it just a bit this time..... sorry"

Ariane's eyebrows shot up when she heard my apology.

"It wasn't an accident this time, right? What was all that? Lille-chan and her

guards cowered as they watched you single-handedly blow away nearly one hundred thousand undead while laughing to yourself, you know?”

She sheathed her sword and looked towards the heavens as she bombarded me with questions.

“Kyun.”

All of a sudden my entire field of view was covered by a ball of fur that had fallen out of the sky.

“Oh, Ponta. Were you a little worried?”

I started talking to the furball..... Ponta, after pulling her off my face.

She was about sixty centimeters long, covered in green fur on her top half while her underbelly and the end of her tail were white, and since she was capable of use wind spirit magic elves referred to her as a spirit beast.

Because of the puffy tail that made up half of her length, she was commonly called a Fluffy Fox.

Once Ponta had settled into her usual spot atop my helmet, she let out an energetic cry and wagged her tail before turning towards Ariane.

Ariane couldn't help but sigh after seeing such a scene.

“If word gets out about an elf being capable of such a feat, it's possible that the kidnappings might increase..... However, there was no helping it this time.”

I had to lower my head at her slightly resigned statement.

However, someone entered the conversation and interrupted us.

“Isn't it all right? After witnessing Arc's power, I can't imagine that they would be reckless enough to show us hostility, given their capabilities. So.....”

A girl was speaking as she approached us..... and one look showed that she wasn't human either.

She was dressed from head to toe in black clothes, cats ears stuck out of her

head and I could see a tail that was wrapped around her waist.

She was a beastman..... specifically, she was a cat beastman that belong to the “Blade Heart Clan”, which I suspected had been founded by someone named “Hanzo”, who had also crossed over into this world.

Even though she was young, her abilities had allowed her to become one of the “six great ninja’s”. Her name was Chiome.

Her almost completely silent approach was definitely reminiscent of a cat’s agile movements.

Seeing Chiome’s blue eyes suddenly snapping towards another direction made me follow after her gaze.

When I did so I was met with the slightly jarring sight of a little girl running across the charred battlefield.

The girl was younger than Chiome, perhaps ten or so. Her curly, light-brown, shoulder-length hair bounce around cutely as she ran.

While a leather breastplate had been strapped over her rather fancy dress, she was far from being suitably equipped for battle. She didn’t even seem to be carrying a weapon.

At first glance, it seemed as if a town girl had snuck onto the battlefield, but she was in fact the Princess of Nozan Kingdom, Lille Nozan Soulia.

She was also the one who requested that I serve as reinforcements to the soldiers in the capital.

A good distance behind the defenseless little girl, her two personal knights and over a hundred cavalymen gradually lead their horses through the battlefield, each of them keeping a cautious eye on me personally.

“Princess Lille, please wait!”

The female knight called out to the girl..... It was rather obvious from her expression, that Nina was being vigilant of me.

However, Lille continued forward as if she hadn't heard the warning, her small body didn't stop moving until she right at my feet, looking straight up at me with her large grey eyes.

"Th-That was amazing, Arc-dono! Elves really do make strong warriors!"

Lille's reaction was one suitable for her age, but the tension behind her eyes brought what Ariane had said to mind.

Despite her small stature, Lille still carried the responsibilities of a royal, and she was attempting to greet me in a friendly manner.

I slowly sheathed my sword so as not to surprise her, placed my hand on my chest, and knelt down on the spot.

"It's an honor to receive such praise. As promised, those that impeded Your Highness's way have been removed. I humbly ask you to forgive me, it appears I got carried away....."

"Kyun!"

It was a slightly theatrical performance, finished off with Ponta tightening her hold on my head and crying out.

Lille's gray eyes nearly popped out when she saw my behavior, but then a small grin appeared on her face and she corrected her posture.

"Arc-dono, there's no need for such formality! It's rather tedious!"

There was no longer any shadow of tension in her eyes as she looked at me.

However, the princess's two escorts, Nina and Zahar, finally caught up with her. The fear and worry in their eyes were greater than the princess's had been.

"Princess Lille! This place is dangerous, please don't wander too far from us!"

The female knight, Nina, reprimanded the princess for wandering onto the battlefield.

She was clearly referring to me when she said "dangerous".

Her reaction was to be expected, all things considered..... besides, there were those showing a more animate reaction. The cavalry's movement slowed to a halt as they approached Lille and her two escorts..... the were hesitating to get any closer to me.

Even if you took the numerous pieces of damaged armor that littered the battlefield into consideration, their sunken faces and reluctance made it easy to deduce their feelings.

Nevertheless, they were troops dispatched to fulfill Lille's request and they managed to lead their horse here, so they could be near her if need be.

After looking back at her escorts and the cavalry, Lille picked up on the atmosphere and began speaking with authority in her response.

"Everyone, there's nothing to fear! Arc-dono has expelled most of the enemies! We'll postpone the elimination of those that linger on the highway, enter the city and meet with my father!"

Her two escorts were bewildered by her declaration but quickly regained their composure as they tried to comprehend the princess's commands.

Nina was the first to speak up.

"Princess, do you tend to let those people into the capital? If such a power were unleashed, the damage would be unimaginable! That person is too....."

Before Nina could finish her next sentence Zahar, who'd been silent up till now, held up his hand and cut her off.

"Arc-dono, you've saved the capit..... no, the Kingdom from this crisis. However, will you swear not to unleash that power within the city? Your strength is simply beyond comprehension."

Zahar's voice was rather tense as he and Nina glanced back and forth between Lille and me.

Ariane seemed like she had something to say, but she only shrugged and sighed as she shook her head.

Even if I promised to comply with Zahar's request, whatever I said ran the risk of coming off as a threat to those aware of the overwhelming power their enemy possessed.

However, refusing to do so would only ostracize me further.

..... I needed to choose my words carefully.

After giving it some thought and taking note of the bad atmosphere, I cleared my throat.

The cavalymen all held their breath because of that slight action on my part.

"We will keep the promise we exchanged with Princess Lille. For our own reasons, we wouldn't benefit from having Soulia conquered or destroyed. In addition, that technique is not something that I can use recklessly....."

I let out a large sigh and shrugged while I spoke.

It wasn't a lie per se. The Heavenly Knight skill Blazing Seraphim of Judgement: Executioner Michael had a massive cooldown-time, and to be honest I would rather not use it all that often.

The mental strain of fusing with the massive existence that was a descending angel was immense, since I was consciously aware of my own existence being overridden. To be frank, the pain which I experienced was equivalent to my first time using spring water at the Dragon King's Tree.

In hindsight, having the main source of pain being tied to the use of a skill made continued use of it rather self-destructive.

I pondered over such thing would watching Zahar's and Nina's reaction.

They seemed to struggle with making a decision on whether or not they should accept the opposition's condition, so I pushed them to hurry along their choose.

"In this really all right? While I certainly destroyed most of the undead this side of the wall, thousands of them still made it inside the city."

The two escorts, the cavalryman, and Lille all stopped with they'd been doing and looked towards the capital behind me.

The flames and smoke still rose across the battlefield and the sounds of battle could be heard from here.

Lille looked back at her escorts shortly after hearing that.

"Now is not the time to cast doubt over Arc-dono! Zahar, Nina, we must enter the city and reach my father! There's no time to waste!"

There was no room for argument in her voice as she turned her small body around and began walking towards the capital.

Nina quickly chased after the Lille before she got too far away.

"Princess Lille, wait! The city is still dangerous! Please, at least remain with the soldiers until we meet your father!"

Contrary to Nina's anxious response, Zahar silently sent a signal the cavalymen behind him before he started speaking.

"We will precede Lille's entrance into the city! Do not falter! Arc-dono, can I entrust you with Princess Lille?"

Although I could feel Nina's heated glare, I nodded in response to Zahar's question.

"Leave it to me. I shall take responsibility for Lille-dono's well-being. Shiden!"

I called for Shiden, who'd been waiting a good distance away.

With a mighty roar, Shiden's massive body began running across the battlefield.

A six-legged, four meters long giant hammered his feet against the ground. Reddish scales covered his entire body, two white horns extended from his head and a white mane stretched down his back.

Watching the dragon mount paying no heed to the scattered pieces of armor it trampled, made him seem more like a living tank than anything else.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

“Giyuriiiiin!”

Shiden began to slow down after passing the cavalrymen and stopped directly in front of me to have an exchange with Ponta.

“Chiome-dono, can you ride with Lille? Ariane-dono and I will walk alongside you.”

Chiome nodded at my suggestion before picking up Lille and leaping onto Shiden’s back and grabbing hold of his reins.

After taking position at the head of the cavalry, Zahar started whispering something into Nina’s ear.

She nodded at whatever he said and lead her horse over to Shiden.

It appeared she’d be acting as our watchdog.

“Many undead still roam the city! Don’t be careless!”

The cavalrymen shouted a passionate battle cry when they heard Zahar’s words.

Nina, Lille and my group were once again at the rear of the formation.

.....It was in this manner that we finally entered the capital.

Chapter 02: Capital City Soulia

Near Soulia's destroyed southern gate.

Due to the destructive impact of my final attack, the hundred and fifty cavalymen had enough room to maneuver their way inside.

Just how much would it cost to repair such an enormous gate?

For the time being, if we have to enter negotiations with the king I'd like to avoid having to pay for the destroyed gate and consider it collateral damage during the destruction of the undead horde.....

With Zahar at the head, the cavalry ventured into the city. The scattered remnants of the destroyed gate made it difficult to steer the horse inside the city.

There were several undead soldiers in the open space beyond the gate, but they were immediately swept away by Zahar's forces.

There were no signs of any living around, bringing the image of a ghost town to mind.

"With a major gate breached, the defense force probably retreated behind the inner wall! We'll take the shortest path there!"

Once the square was secured Zahar directed his horse towards the main street as he issued his orders and set off.

In the meantime, Ariane and I had moved next to Shiden and were now following behind them.

Undead soldiers would crop up from time to time, but they were quickly dispatched by the cavalymen.

Their numbers were few, but the occasional spider chimera would attack us.

The two-headed and four-armed mixture of a human figure that sprung from the lower body of an enormous spider where strange, to say the least.

While their strength exceeded that of a normal human, trapped within the confines of an urban setting, they proved to be no match for Ariane's and my power.

“Flying Dragon Slash!”

I attacked the spider-chimeras as they appeared.

An arc of light was sent flying towards the chimera whenever I swung my sword in their direction, they raised its shield to defend themselves or had their legs severed.

'Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes'

Once they were immobilized Ariane would deliver the finishing blow from a distance.

The pale flames that enveloped her sword would spring out and attack the chimera like a whip.

Even though the chimera had a large field of vision, after the first attack distracted them Ariane's flames easily slipped into their blind spot. Once the wound was dealt their bodies were devoured by the fire.

Even if the enemy tried to launch a surprise attack from above, atop of Shiden, Chiome unitized her superior senses to locate them before they struck.

“Water Style: Water Kunai' Arc-dono, the roof on the right.”

Chiome detected an enemy and attacked it, all without releasing Shiden's reins.

Our position at the rear allowed me to use transfer magic with little fear of the others seeing it.

“Got it! Dimensional Step! Shield Bash!!”

When I materialized in front of the spider chimera on top of the roof, the creature was clearly startled by it, but I used my shield to knock it to the ground below without much thought.

Yoooouuu, whou ari you!?

While it's multiple sets of eyes were blown wide open, it was completely unaware of Ariane's waiting sword.

It reserved a vicious slash on top of the fall damage. Then the cavalry took their swing at it.

Once the spider chimera died its body began breaking down on the spot, leaving only a black stain on the street.

Originally, Zahar's cavalry seemed to be fearful of the spider-chimera's seemingly overwhelming might and their role as leader of the other undead, but their fear gradually diminished thanks to our presence.

However, I felt one pair of eyes piercing me on the very spot I stood, the source of the gaze was non-other than a surprised Nina.

..... I forgot that she was accompanying Lille.

I'd been so concentrated on dealing with the enemy I unconsciously used transfer magic in front of Nina.

My eyes darted over the rest of the troops, searching for any other witnesses, but they were all cautiously scanning the area ahead of them.

Lille was clinging to Chiome and looking straight at the cavalry ahead of her.

Ariane glanced side to side before letting out a deep sigh and urging Shiden and the others forward.

Even though the other troops hadn't seen the magic, now wasn't the time to be relieved. Nina would most likely tell Zahar, who'd then inform the princess of it, meaning the magic's existence would likely reach the King's ears before our meeting with him.

"Hmm, I guess I should prepare for Ariane-dono's scolding after this....."

After I said that, Ponta started pounding on my helmet with her forepaw as she cried out and vigorously wagged her tail.

“Kyun!”

“For now, let’s focus on reaching our destination.”

While replying to Ponta, I swung my sword at the spider chimera that showed up on a roof across the street.

The instant I launched the Flying Dragon Slash I transferred to the opposite side of the street and delivered the finishing blow.

The human upper body let out a scream before falling off the roof to the ground below, while the spider half simply dropped at my feet.

After glancing at it for a moment I glanced in the direction the cavalry was heading.

“Hm, so that’s the inner wall.....”

Looking over the rooftops of Soulia..... I laid my eyes upon the high walls that separated the inner city from the rest.

I looked back at the southern gate we entered from, trying to triangulate our current position.

“We’re about halfway there.”

“Kyun.”

At Ponta’s cry, I transferred to the back of the group and quietly returned to my place by Shiden’s side.

Nina gave me another surprised look, but she remained silent and returned to scanning the area, apparently deciding not to bring it up now.

Eventually, the troops arrived in the open square in front of the inner wall. The closed gate in front of us was smaller than the southern gate. Its large, wooden doors were covered by an iron grate you’d expect to see on a fortress’s last line of defense.

Above the gate was a stone rampart, probably used for surveillance, where I

could see the figures of multiple soldiers moving about.

The cavalry was greeted with cheers from atop the city wall, as our trek through the undead overwhelmed streets was already known of.

Those among them had been shocked when they caught sight of Shiden bringing up the rear, however, they resumed their cheers when they saw Lille waving at them from atop the mount, the heavy atmosphere around us since we entered the city had vanished.

Hearing the cheers of the other soldiers raised the morale of the cavalryman.

Zahar divided the cavalry into three units and ordered them to clear the square of the undead while he approached the gate himself.

I thought about joining in to help them, but before I could raise my sword a sudden noise near the gate drew my attention.

The source of the noise was at the center of the wall rampart..... a figure dressed unlike any of the soldiers had appeared.

The middle-aged man dressed in the clothes of a noble was causing quite a stir amongst the soldiers.

Given that the soldiers seemed to be frightened of this man, and that there were people chasing after him, the man must have been apart of the higher nobility.

I didn't recognize the person, but Nina and Zahar immediately straightened their postures once they saw him and Lille joyful expression made it rather easy to figure out who he was.

“Father! Lille Nozan Soulia has returned!”

Atop the inner wall, the middle-aged man... No, Lille's father and the king was shouting orders at the surrounding soldiers, who were quick to fulfill them.

“Open the gate! Open the gate!”

Shortly after the order was given the heavy iron gates began to rise and the

wooden doors began to slowly open.

“Lille-sama, this way! All soldiers, remain cautious as we pass through the gate!”

Zahar prompted Chiome, who held Shiden’s reins and sat in front of the princess, to move forward and also instructed the troops to quickly make their way inside the inner wall.

Chiome gave him a small nod and directed Shiden inside.

Ariane and I were the last ones to pass through the gate and were greeted by the troops receiving a warm welcome from the citizen and soldiers gathered in the area.

“So many people.....”

“Yeah. Looks like they don’t have any room to spare.”

Ariane chimed in when she heard my comment about the area inside the inner wall.

Since the outer wall had been breached, the other side of this gate had turned into a battlefield. The number of people gathering so close to the front lines was indicative of how crowded this place was.

If they’d been forced to remain under siege, it’s doubtful of how long they could’ve held out.

Even with our rushed march, we only made it at the very last minute.

My thoughts on the subject were interrupted when I caught sight of Lille’s father descending the rampart and heading towards Shiden.

Lille, who saw him as well, leaped out of the saddle and ran towards him.

“Lille!”

“Father!”

The two of them seemed to beam with joy as they embraced one another.

Lille's father, the King, must have thought the world of her, because he craned head and sent a prayer towards the heavens after kissing her cheeks.

Lille unabashedly accepted her father's embrace without any sign of discomfort.

However, the King eventually recovered his composure and directed a harsh look towards his beloved daughter.

"Lille, why did you return? You were told to head to the Dimo Earldom."

The King's voice deepened as his hard eyes were drawn towards both of his daughter's suddenly kneeling escorts.

Behind us, a clicking sound signaled that the gate had been closed. The sound echoed throughout the area, being the chatter to a stop and exposing the king's disfavor to everyone.

The anger behind the king's eyes originated from a parent discovering that their child had been brought to a dangerous location.

Under the pressure of the King's gaze, Zahar lowered his head and began to apologize.

"I am sorry, my King. All responsibility fa—"

However, Lille moved her small body in-between the two of them and cut off Zahar in the middle of his sentence.

"The blame does not fall on Zahar and Nina! It was my decision to return here! To just do nothing..... to watch as my country dies....."

You could hear the tears mixing into her speech as she defended her two escorts and revealed that she had disobeyed her father's wishes.

Even if she was royalty, she was still a little girl.

Still aware of the eyes that were on them, the King started stroking Lille's head and comfort her while she struggled to say her next words.

“I’m sorry Lille..... Before I am a king, I am a worried father.”

The patted down Lille’s golden locks before crouching down and whispering into her ear, but he once again wore a King’s expression as he righted himself and looked in my direction.

“Then, can you identify those people and what purpose they have here?”

Unlike before, the full dignity of a king was now on full display, so Ariane, Chiome and I prepared to bow and reply to his question.

However, Lille wiped the tears from her eyes and answered before we could do anything.

“These are the people I hired to rescue the capital! If not for their power we wouldn’t be standing here now.”

The King’s gaze gave so another once over after hearing her explanation.

“An elf and..... a beastmen?”

The king was a bit confused as he looked over Chiome and Ariane, but the when I removed my helmet, punta and all, his eyes seem to admit defeat over the matter.

Naturally, I drank some of the spring water in advance, since someone with a skeletal face was rather frightening to the denizens of this world..... so they saw the face of a middle-aged, red-eyed dark elf instead.

It was like a large question mark formed over the King’s head as doubt crept into his face when he looked over Ariane and myself once more.

“They seem different from the regular elves, are they from Rouen Forest?”

Just like when that question was asked before, Ariane was quick to delay the connection.

“No, we are from Great Canada Forest. I am a dark elf and the one in the armor is..... a strange elf.”

I bitterly chuckled at Ariane's haphazard introduction and put my helmet back on before the water's effects wore off.

"What reasons would elves from such a distant forest have to help a human country?"

The king fixed a cold stare on me as he asked us about our aims.

Zahar, who'd remained behind Lille till now, slowly began open his mouth.

"My King, there is something you need to know....."

Zahar's voice trailed off as he half stood from his kneeling position and began filling the King in on what had occurred up till now.

The King's expression was dyed the color of surprise as he looked in-between Zahar and me, his eyes bulged as he asked "Is that true?" in a small voice.

The King broke into a cold sweat as he Zahar informed him of the part the "reinforcement" played in recent events.

Silence fell over the area as the crowd watched their exchange play out until a shouting person pushed his way to the front of the crowd.

Chapter 03: Cardinal Palermo

“King Asparuf, what’s going on!?”

The man who spoke was approaching the King with large strides.

He wore luxurious robes reminiscent of priest garbs, his hair was slicked back, and, unusual in this world, he wore a pair of rimmed glasses.

The suspicious person who suddenly appeared didn’t even bother to bow before he spoke, but the king’s answer revealed the man’s identity.”

“Palermo-sama, how is the condition of the Church’s flock?”

When the King asked the man..... Palermo about his concerns about the ‘church’, frustration crept into the edges of the man’s gentle expression, based on his attitude towards the king I suspected he was of high social standing.

There were two other people that could barely contain themselves when the ‘church’ was brought up.

There was only one religion in this land that held any degree of power. This man was without a doubt tied to the Hiruku religion.

Ariane’s and Chiome’s ears pricked up as they glared at the flashily dressed priest who appeared to be around thirty years old.

Probably sensing their gaze, the man turned around without answering the king, only to be utterly startled when he saw them.

“Your majesty! What is the meaning of this?! In addition to the beastmen in the city, what is an elf doing in human territory!?”

The barely maintained mild expression completely vanished as he roughly scolded the people around us.

Neither King Asparuf nor anyone else in his vicinity spoke up against Palermo’s sudden outburst, even from here I could see unrest and distress seeping into the people’s expressions.

Even for outsiders like us, it was obvious from watching their behavior how the balance of power between the two was split.

“Capture that vile beastmen and elf so that they may be brought under the church’s control! Your Highness, I would like a full explanation of this fiasco later! But for now, arrest these people!”

Lille, her two bodyguards and the cavalry who had been brought here as reinforcements all showed their displeasure at what Palermo had said.

While I expected things would get out of hand, I didn’t count on Ariane and Chiome making the first move.

“You’re just a lowly beast and an elf..... You’re worth less than an animal, let alone a human being..”

Ariane’s golden eyes took on a dangerous glint as she took hold of her sheathed sword, while Chiome’s nose twitched after she brandished her dagger.

I wasn’t the only one surprised by their actions..... The king, Lille and Zahar were all shell-shocked by the deteriorating situation.

However, Nina was quick to react.

Although she was half a second slower than Ariane, she drew her own sword and stepped in-between us and the royal family.

“You are in the King’s presence! Sheathe your sword now or this shall be treated as an act of rebellion!!”

Ariane raised an eyebrow and gave a bitter smile at Nina’s command.

“Rebellion..... We aren’t your King’s subjects in the first place.”

Her eyes searched the area as she rebutted in disgust.

Ariane set her sights on the one who had instigated this whole scene and opened her mouth.

“The man with the flashy appearance over there is an undead pretending to be

human.”

My gaze naturally returned to Palermo after she made such a shocking statement, only to find him glaring back at me. Atop my helmet, Ponta gave him a threatening growl.

“Greee.....”

Palermo had been so preoccupied with the growl he failed to notice Ariane’s approach.

In an instant, Ariane closed the distance between herself and Palermo and unleashed her sword with lightning quickness.

“Gyaaaaaaaaa!!! M-My Armmmmmm!!!”

Palermo’s screams echoed through the area as a spray of black blood accompanied his left arm falling to the ground.

Things immediately became hectic as Zahar and the other confused soldiers readied their weapons.

“What are you doing?! I am a cardinal of the Hiruku Religion!! Capture those savages that attacked me and kill them!!”

The soldiers under Zahar’s command reluctantly began to surround us at cardinal Palermo’s order.

I figured that he’d been a high-ranking member of the church, but I thought he was a bishop or something, not a cardinal. I wasn’t all that familiar with church hierarchy but that post should be close to the top.

For such a high-ranking member’s true identity to be that of an undead, just what kind of church was the Hiruku religion?

For all intents and purposes, Palermo looked and acted like a human, but I doubt Ariane and Chiome would lie about such matters.

Anyway, this wasn’t the right time to worry about his.....

Lille and her father were still trying to comprehend the constantly shifting situation and hadn't given the soldiers any orders. They simply followed whatever order Palermo managed to get out in-between his screams.

Somehow I had to get him to reveal his true nature all without harming the surrounding soldiers, civilians, or royals.

“Hm. My, my.... This is getting rather troublesome.....”

With that comment, I drew my sword with one hand, lightly brandished it once and rested the blade on my shoulder.

The resulting howl and blast of wind were more than a bit effective as the soldiers simultaneously shouted and leaped back. There was even a person who had been so surprised that he cowered down and covered his head with his arms.

While their unabashed dread was a problem, it had its uses.

“Arc-dono! What the hell was that!?”

As this place continued to drown in confusion, Zahar raised his sword and demanded an explanation.

The problem was just that they wouldn't believe me even if I told them the truth.

Ariane gave me a slight grin when she watched their reactions before focusing her gaze back to Palermo.

“How long do you intend to continue with that poor performance? In the presence of an elf and a beastman? We can immediately tell that you aren't human!”

Saying this, Ariane swung her sword to deliver a second blow, but this time Palermo saw it coming and leaped backward.

However, that leap was beyond the level of human capability.

The surrounding people let out a surprised gasp and fell into an even deeper stupor when they witnessed it.

The person in front of them was undead..... Elves were capable of seeing the ‘impurities’ that surrounded the undead, and the superior senses of beastmen allowed them to smell them.

However, humans lacked the means to determine if the cardinal in front of them was an undead or not.

While I could tentatively be considered an elf, it was impossible for me to see these undead ‘impurities’, so I couldn’t make a judgment call until I saw that abnormal leap.

The only undead who had shown any kind of intelligence had been the spider-chimera and the amorphous monster I encountered in Tajiento.

With his missing left arm and a pained expression, Palermo looked nothing like either of those deformed monsters.

However, that assertion was quickly overturned.

“Tch, to be brought so low by inferior races..... Today is a really unpleasant day, I doubt I can finish the plan by myself now.”

Palermo said with a frown, his face distorting in pain as the stump of his left arm began to swell and grow into a new limb.

“Wh-What is that!?”

Hearing someone shout in panic, a fiendish smile appeared on Palermo’s face.

'Rejoice, for one of the seven cardinals, Palermo Avaritia Liberalitas shall guide you to the land of the dead! Rest assured, it will be a peaceful death!'

A deep and intimidating voice bellowed from within Palermo’s chest, the flesh of his body convulsing as if something was trying to break through the human shell.

Two protrusions tore through the back of the cardinal’s luxurious robe and began to form a new set of arms. Hair started to sprout all over his body and his face started to resemble a cross between an owl and a monkey.

Rows of long fangs lined the edges of a newly formed black beak and a two-meter long tentacle, which resembled the sandworm I faced some time ago, sprung out of his tailbone.

Muscles fleshed out his body, which was now just shy of three meters in height.

His former bespectacled eyes had turned a bloodshot red as he glared at the surrounding people.

Although he looked like a huge, four armed squirrel monkey I doubt that anyone would consider this monstrosity cute.



That man had just transformed into a never-seen-before monster..... even in a world filled with monsters and various races, this was a rather shocking development to see.

Fear and shock colored the expression of those witnessing it, some were falling to their, others cursed their fate and others fled.

The King and Lille were taken aback by all of this and got mixed up with the crowd of fleeing citizens.

When Palermo caught sight of the royal family, a low muffled laughter escaped his beak as he slowly turned his body towards them.

'Hehehe, let's wipe this kingdom off the map.....'

Along with his foreboding comment, Palermo immediately accelerated towards King Asparuf.

Within a single moment, Zahar had grasped the meaning of Palermo's words and actions, raising his sword and shouting orders at the other soldiers.

"Protect the King!! That thing is after the King's life!! Stop it at all cost!!!"

The soldiers regained their sense upon receiving his orders and started moving.

"Princess Lille, get back!!"

Nina stepped forward with her sword readied to protect Lille.

A few soldiers tried to block Palermo's charge, but they weren't much of a roadblock as the monstrous cardinal simply throw the soldiers with a set of his arms.

On top of being incapable of stopping his rampage towards the King, the soldier that his back arms tossed aside let out a final scream before their bodies were smashed to bloody chunks against nearby buildings.

.....Fast!

Ariane tried to pursue but the difference in height and leaping capability were too great for her to overcome.

The soldiers were also useless as human shields.

With a great leap, Palermo seamlessly dodged Zahar's attack and landed in front of King Asparuf.

'You shall be the first to fall into hell, King!!'

“Father!!”

Princess Lille tried running towards her father, but her screams were overtaken by Palermo's gleeful laughter as Nina held the princess back.

The movement of Palermo's fist seemed painfully slow to watch.

I doubted even I could make it in time. But now wasn't the time for unnecessary thoughts.

“Hang on Ponta! Dimensional Step!”

Chapter 04: Those Who Bare Their Fangs

I materialized in-between King Asparuf and Palermo with my shield raised to block the cardinal's swing.

The impact of the collision sunk my feet into the street's stone pavement.

I clenched my teeth and pushed against the force of the blow with my shield, creating an opening for me to slash at Palermo with my sword.

Although the air itself was parted, Palermo had leaped back to avoid the blow, furthermore, he added a backflip to his retreat, putting even more distance between us.

Palermo's massive size caused cracks to form in the patch of stone pavement he landed on.

"Hm, never came across a monster like this before....."

I shook my left arm to get rid of the numbness as while I grumbled.

My easygoing manner only seemed to anger Palermo. His bloodshot red eyes glow brighter and brighter as his face transformed into an even more frightening visage.

'What in the world are you!? You share the Pope's transfer methods! There's no way a human could block my attack with one hand!!'

While saliva flew out from Palermo's beak-like mouth as he yelled at me, Ariane, Chiome and I shared a look.

If his words were to be believed, the Pope of the Hiruku religion was capable of using transfer magic just as I was. While it was extremely useful in it of itself, it became a rather troublesome tool in enemy hands.

I thought we'd found the mastermind behind these church-related incidents when one of the cardinals appeared, but it appeared that the Pope was the true ringleader.

.....No, even if undead soldiers didn't require much logistical support, it would be strange if the one controlling the organization hadn't been involved with preparing a hundred thousand soldiers.

I bottled that chain of thought for now, and I fixed my gaze on the enemy before me.

Ariane and Chiome were slowly approaching with weapons raised, most likely intending to aim at Palermo's blind spot, so I needed to offer them support in the front.

"I'm not a human, but an elf. Sorry that your opponent is of such a lowly race."

The hairs on Palermo's body stood up when I shrugged my shoulders and spoke.

'An elf!? You're an elf too!!'

Palermo smashed one set of his hands against the ground in anger while the other set of hands caught the debris that created, launching the chunks of pavement towards Ariane and Chiome.

"Kch!" "Wha!?"

Their preternatural reflexes allowed the two to dodge the surprise attack.

However, some of the other soldiers standing behind them were torn to shreds by the flying debris.

He hadn't taken his eyes off of me when he'd attack them, so he must have had a wide field of vision.

The soldiers' morale plummeted when they witnessed Palermo's overwhelming destructive power.

Palermo smiled when he noticed that his encirclement had been broken before he returned his focus to me, apparently noticing something.

'I remember now. You're that silver knight who killed Charos!'

Palermo nodded his head along with that insertion while I was left there holding my sword and trying to figure out what he meant.

Around my neck, Ponta let out a “Kyun?”, seemingly as confused as I was.

“Who’s Charos? I don’t remember killing anyone named Charos.”

Though I never even met the person Palermo called Charos, a former enemy that the name belonged to suddenly came to mind.

..... I had no proof, but he could have been the monstrosity I fought in Tajiento.

Palermo, as if he’d been reading my thoughts, pointed at me and started laughing.

'That’s right! The one you fought in Tajiento was cardinal Charos!! That guy was the weakest among the seven of us, but he wasn’t so weak that an ordinary man could defeat him! However, don’t even treat me in the same way!!'

Ariane and Chiome watched our exchange play out with shocked expressions.

There were at least five other monsters such as this one.

So, the monstrosity I’d faced in Tajiento wasn’t only this Charos person, but it had been clearly stated that he’d been under control of the Hiruku religion.

“So that vulgar caterpillar was a friend of yours?”

Was the Hiruku Theocracy just a country of undead?

'Gahahaha, caterpillar! A fitting description of that groveling fool..... I have to ask though, what are elves doing in a human city?'

A brutal smirk formed on Palermo’s face as he laughed.

Even though he was aware that I’d killed Charos, due the fact that he’d been the weakest of the seven, Palermo didn’t fear me.

Although I wouldn’t say that Charos had been a powerful foe under any circumstances, he wasn’t someone I’d call weak either.

And Palermo had ranked himself above the fallen Cardinal.

I was still feeling the after-effects of using the heavenly Knight Skill outside the city, so this would be a difficult fight.

I cast my gaze on both sides of Palermo as I thought things over.

.....However, this time I had reliable companions by my side.

Ariane's golden eyes and Chiome blue eyes met my own beneath my helmet. We were all in agreement.

"We have our circumstances. I don't have to explain myself to a monkey general."

It was a cheap provocation, but I wasn't used to provoking people, and it was the best I could come up with on the spot.

That's what I thought, but the enemy didn't think the same.

'Bastard!! How dare you, an inferior race, ridicule the power bestowed onto me by the Pope!!'

He was exactly like an angered monkey.

His muscles swelled up and veins bulged on his head as he screamed his curses.

His eyes were consumed by an even bloodier red as Palermo's massive body leaped towards me.

It looks like he became really reckless.

The destination of Palermo's leap was just in front of me, my sword began to light up as I invoked a skill in retaliation.

"Sword of Judgement!"

A magic formation appeared at the location that Palermo would land before a sword of light meant to hit him shot into the air.

However, Palermo let out a mighty roar and smashed the sword with his hammer-like fist.

The sound of shattering glass filled the area as Palermo utterly destroyed the sword of light.

“What!?”

Although I expected him to dodge the Sword of Judgement, I never thought he’d crush it with his bare hands.

Honestly, his hulking ape-like form had me treat him like a run of the mill physical-based monster instead of an undead.

'Heheh, while it’s the first time I’ve seen this magic, it’s not that strong though!'

Even as he chuckled upon landing, Palermo’s body tensed in preparation for his next attack.

I blocked the first blow with my shield but he’d already prepared himself for the follow-up.

He’d readied his third fist for another blow, but Palermo fled onto the sidewalk in order to avoid my counterattack.

However, Ariane and Chiome had already covered the distance between us and launched their own attacks.

'— Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes'

Ariane unleashed her fire spirit magic..... the flames started to coil around her blade before extending out like a whip, lashing out at Palermo as if they had a will of their own.

However, the flames were extinguished with a swing of his arm.

He’d easily blown away the Holy Knight’s magical skill Sword of judgment with his bare hand, and it appeared that he could do the same with other magic.

..... But, there were results.

Small patches of burnt fur appeared on the arm he'd used to extinguish Ariane's attack.

While he was capable of resistant magic, he wasn't able to prevent the heat generated by the magic. Moreover, he seemed to lack the rapid regenerative ability that Charos had possessed.

'Water Style: Water Spear!!'

Chiome made her move and attacked Palermo with her ninjutsu.

Her right hand glowed slightly before a small, undulating stream of water gushed forth. The stream immediately took the form of a spear which Chiome proceeded to throw at our enemy.

'A beastmen capable of magic!? Impudent wretch!!'

Palermo glared at Chiome as he cursed her.

I expected Palermo to simply knock the water spear away as he'd done with the other forms of magic, but he must have been bad with penetrating attacks because he simply leapt away.

However, Chiome had predicted Palermo's reaction and prepared another attack in advance.

The instant he leaped to avoid the spear, two water wolves created by Chiome's ninjutsu attacked him from behind.

Her nearly transparent wolves were hard to detect if given enough distance.

The flashy manner in which she threw her spear had been nothing but a distraction to conceal the true attack.

Such was the tactic of the ninja Chiome.....

Unlike wild wolves, which would have gone for their victim's throat, under Chiome's control the water wolves targeted Palermo's ankles.

Palermo was four meters tall, his sheer size and muscle mass should have been a natural blind spot. Not to mention that the water wolves were nigh-invisible.

'Ghaa! Damn it! Beastmen pest!!'

Palermo's grimaced as one of the wolves bit into his ankle, indicating that damage had gotten through.

Still, before the other wolf could attack, Palermo hopped away on one leg. However, Chiome's wolf hadn't released its grasp.

Her ninjutsu was a technique gave her complete control over the manifested water wolves.

She wouldn't allow her prey to get away that easily.

The moment Palermo leaped into the air, Chiome climbed atop a nearby building and used another ninjutsu skill.

'Water Style: Water Spear!!'

Palermo was still being carried by the momentum from his leap and had no way to avoid the spear flying towards him.

The spear managed to pierce the surface of Palermo's shoulder. Unlike Ariane's wide-spreading flames, the spear's power had been focused into a minimal strike zone.

'Gaaaaaaaaaa!! Fuck!'

Palermo shouted as his posture was shattered while he was still in mid-air.

Regardless of being a human or an elf, Palermo's tremendous power was a threat best neutralized by restricting his movements.

Perhaps for someone like Ariane, Chiome, and Glenys his attacks were nothing more than brutish movements.

Power was meaningless if your attacks could be predicted well in advance.

..... As the saying goes, “There’s no such thing as the unhittable.”

I stepped forward to deliver a decisive blow.

“Evil Sealing Holy Sword”

It was a Holy Knight skill super effective against the undead. The 'Holy Thunder Sword' began to shine with a brilliant light as my eyes locked onto the falling Palermo.

I tightened my grip and raised my sword to cut him down, Palermo managed to jerk away at the last second, but his body’s sheer size and abnormal form made it easy to hit.

One of the arms growing out of Palermo’s back had been severed by my slash, his body rolling to the side by the time I readied my sword again.

The light that had coated my sword was extremely toxic to Palermo’s undead body, as the flesh around the wound was charred and crumbling.

'Ghaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!'

The air vibrated, as the monster that Palermo had become screamed in agony.

Cracks started to form in his chest, leaking blackened blood, as Palermo managed to dodge my next attack by desperately rolling away.

Victory wouldn’t be so easy to obtain.

'You... You'

Slime-like drool dripped out of Palermo’s beak as his round eyes frantically darted around the area, apparently searching for something.

His gaze finally honed in on his own severed arm.

However, along with his arm, Palermo was also treated to the sight of Ariane fearlessly laughing as she rolled it across the ground with her foot.

'—Infernal Flames, reduce all to ash—'

In response to her chant, an intense flame ignited the severed arm, completely devouring it in a matter of seconds.

Every hair on Palermo's body stood up as he let out another angry shout.

Based on the way he'd acted, Palermo didn't have the ability to regenerate the arm but he did have some way to reattach it.

However, Ariane had literally reduced those hopes to ash.

'You whoreeeee!!!'

With a primal shout, Palermo charged towards Ariane with superhuman speed.

Stopping a heavyweight wouldn't be easy.

“Ariane-dono! Flying Dragon Slash!”

I urged her to dodge while launching a mid-ranged attack.

The beam of energy the 'Holy Thunder Sword' released hit Palermo head on but it immediately dispersed.

While his momentum was slowed, the attack was ineffective overall.

Elsewhere, the resulting shock wave from my attack blew the shingles off the rooftops.

It couldn't be helped, the narrow streets made it difficult to use mid- and long-range attacks.

Ariane clicked her tongue and had an exasperated expression when I used Dimensional Step to place myself in-between her and Palermo.

The implications of her look were clear.

'—Mother Earth, return all things to tranquility, swallow everything beneath the ground—'

Ariane gradually pierced the ground with her sword as a song-like incantation escaped her lips.



The tip of her sword sank into a gap in-between the pavement, and ripples began to spread out in a fan-like pattern from the point of contact. Mud erupted from the ground and began to erode the stones one by one.

The ground had been turned into a quagmire, but it moved as if it were alive, swallowing everything into a bottomless swamp.

The quagmire's range rapidly spread, causing some of the nearby buildings to start collapsing as it devoured their foundations, while the soldiers who had been watching the fight fled screaming.

In the middle of Ariane's carnivorous bog stood a halted Palermo.

He was already knee deep in the quagmire and his weight was causing him to sink even further.

'What is this!? My legs won't move. No, something's entering my body!!'

Shouted the enormous confused monkey monster within the quagmire.

As his maneuverability was lost, Palermo's movements gradually became more sluggish as a white substance began to creeping up his body.

The spreading of the quagmire eventually halted and almost every living thing that had been caught in it was returned to the earth.

There'd been a considerable amount of collateral damage done to the city, and I was mildly shocked that Ariane would use area-of-effect magic here.

"I'm surprised that this undead was able to retain its body even after being affected by this magic. Still, once something is dead it will return to the earth sooner or later....."

Ariane had a small smile on her face as she removed her sword from the ground and cleared off the dirt with a graceful swing.

'Imbecile..... Imbecile..... I-I'mmm!!'

Even as his gigantic chest began to turn white and his body started to resemble a dead tree, Palermo was slowly approaching Ariane through sheer rage and

determination as he screamed at her.

'— Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes'

Intense flames sprung from the base of her sword once more when she repeated her chant, simultaneously raising the temperature as it took shape.

Ariane ignored Palermo's curses as she pointed her sword towards his chest.

The flames that flew from the tip of her sword buried themselves into Palermo's chest, the fire spreading across his body for a moment before they erupted into a pillar of flames.

'!!!'

As his body was consumed by the flames, Palermo's death wail could be heard throughout all of Soulia.

However, it lasted but a moment and only the sound of burning flesh remained afterward.

Hmm, I guess that's it then.

“Kyun.”

As I sheathed my sword, Ponta uncoiled herself from around my neck and let out a cry to signify the conclusion of the battle. Before hopping onto her favorite spot, she dusted off my helmet with her bushy tail.

While I smiled at Ponta's antics, my eyes gradually combed over the area once more.

Though the city's inner wall somehow got away unscratched, several of the nearby houses had been half swallowed by the earth.

However, it was still a better outcome than Tajiento had received.

Not that that would be a consolation to the affected residents.

“That was amazing, Ariane-dono.”

“Chiome-chan, you were pretty good yourself.”

The two of them expressed mutual praises for a well-earned victory.

While Ariane said that she and Chiome were friends, the two were closer to comrades in arms than anything else.

Sometimes it seemed as if the two of them had made an arrangement between themselves, and that bond shined through here.

Personally, I thought it was very pleasing to watch a cute girl and a beautiful woman interact with one another, but I seemed to be the only one.

All the humans who had witnessed our battle were left in a state of shocked awe as they gazed at us from a distance.

Without paying them any mind, Ariane looked at what had once been Palermo, before opening her mouth again.

“I overdid things a bit, but hopefully their impression of Arc has faded somewhat.”

When she let out a slight sigh and made her statement, I understood the point of this whole incident.

She’d been trying to diminish the impact of my rampage outside the city.

Certainly, the reveal of Palermo’s true form and the magic that destroyed part of the city would leave a strong impact on the people.

However.....

“Hou, you were acting in an unusually over-the-top manner, Ariane-dono. And while it had been a bother for me..... is this alright? All that seems to have been accomplished is that the people now think there’s more than one monster.....”

Ariane shrugged her shoulders and avoided eye contact when I questioned her.

“It’s okay. We’re speaking with the King after this, right? Having an effective

threat should move things along easily, shouldn't it?

My eyes looked for the person she was casually speaking of and found King Asparuf standing in the center of a circle of soldiers with a solemn look on his face.

While I think that too much of something could be poisonous, I didn't have any idea about how Asparuf would approach this situation.

"Nevertheless, we have to consider what Palermo said. Since we were here, the damage was kept to a minimum, but there are five more monsters just like him out there. Arc, he boasted that he'd been stronger than that Charos fellow you dealt with in Tajiento, was that the case?"

Ariane looked at me again when she asked that question, while Chiome's ears perked up because she was also interested in my answer.

I recalled my battle with the monstrosity named Charos before I responded.

"Well, I don't mean to boast about my own heroics, but Charos had definitely been the more troublesome of the two."

I looked straight at Ariane as I spoke my honest opinion about both fights.

She seemed to have taken my opinion to heart and started stroking her chin as she thought something over.

"I see....."

"Of course, my opinion is based on having Chiome-dono's and your help this time."

I didn't understand the purpose of her initial question, but Ariane brushed off my additional comment.

"I don't care about that, but..... something has to be done about the Hiruku religion."

She narrowed her eyes as she looked off in the distance.

Chapter 05: The End of Salma Kingdom

Eastern border of Salma Kingdom, the Branier territory.

The territory originally was a part of Nozan Kingdom, but seventy years ago, it was awarded to the Branier family for their patriarch spearheading the Salma eastern expansion.

Since then, the Branier family was awarded a noble title and tasked with governing the border territory for generations.

In the center of the territory sat an unusual castle. Before the territory had been conquered by Salma Kingdom, the previous lord had resided in a luxurious mansion. However, that mansion had been converted into its current form, complete with a massive defensive wall usually reserved for forts.

In one of the offices within the residence..... an elderly man restlessly waited at his large wooden work desk.

His stout body snugly fit within the lavish chair, while his receding gray hair, sharp eyes, deep wrinkles, and mustache only added to its intimidating figure.

This man was Margrave Wendelin De Branier.

Unlike the nobility of the capital, Margrave Branier possessed the aura of a knight or warrior.

Originally, Salma Kingdom's borders were once constantly contested by Nozan Kingdom, Delfuento Kingdom, and what is nowadays the Hiruku theocracy, which had been once known as the Arthus Kingdom..... While all of those countries coveted the large and plentiful region, having a military ruler like him govern the land usually kept them at bay.

Still, the circumstances of the neighboring countries changed about a hundred years ago when the power of the Arthus Kingdom was transferred from the King to the Pope of the Hiruku church.

Back then, the Pope used his holy knights to conquer the holy city, and the

Arthus Kingdom vanished from the maps when the kingdom's last king officially transferred power to the church.

The Pope back then had advocated for "Peace among the people".

After that, where the Arthus Kingdom repeatedly crossed the borders and invaded the other countries, the pope spent his life establishing new borderlines and from that point onward all invasions suddenly ceased.

Despite the unilaterally imposed border, none of the neighboring countries dared to oppose the Hiruku Theocracy because the country had become the center of the most widespread religion on the Continent and was home to the Pope.

The conflict between the three countries took center stage, but Salma Kingdom's eastern expansion was the last major invasion, the great wars decade spanning wars were reduced to sporadic fights.

One reason was that the Hiruku Theocracy became a rather affluent country once it had been freed from expanses of constant warring.

Witnessing the upturn of the Theocracy's fortunes sparked a sense of crisis within the other countries, so they began enacting policies that would safeguard their national security.

The nobility of Salma Kingdom left the task of defending the border to the Branier family and pursued power within the Kingdom itself.

As a result, the nobility that had been fundamental to the protection of the country directed their efforts towards gaining the King's favor and the pleasures of life, it became a rarity for them to protect the border territories.

There was no denying that the establishment of the Hiruku Theocracy calmed the strife between its neighboring nations, bringing peace to the region, but doubts remain about it bringing peace to the people.

Although the nobility lived comfortable lives, the common man was burdened by the cost of their luxurious lifestyles. It couldn't be said that they lived rich lives.

“If the country falls into chaos, the capital’s nobles might be too late to respond.....”

Margrave Branier spoke in the otherwise empty room and looked towards the ceiling as he mulled over these facts.

The recent incidents in his territory were bothering him.

First, there were the sightings mentioned in the reports.

Monsters that had never been seen before had been spotted along the Kingdom’s borders, the witnesses catching sight of them crossing the Uiru river after the creatures left the elven forest of Rouen.

Then there were the reports that one of those very monsters had been seen chasing after an unknown armed force.

In order to gain a hold of the situation, Branier had organized a search party for the monsters and the mysterious armed force.

The soldiers that had conducted the search encountered deformed, two-headed spider-human hybrids. Four of those deformed monsters had been found in the territory and while the platoons suffered heavy casualties, they still managed to defeat them.

The fact that even one of those creatures matched a platoon in terms of strength, and the direction they appeared from, had been enough for him to send messengers to Larisa.

Nozan Kingdom was also a possible target... with those monsters likely chasing some official through his territory, chances were that some kind of tragedy had already occurred inside that Kingdom, so Margrave Barnier had decided to send scouts to the Kingdom.

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that whatever report they returned with would determine the fate of Branier’s territory.

Still, all that was in the future.

It would take at least three days for the scouts to reach the capital of Nozan,

and five days for the scouts to reach Salma's. The return trip would probably take even longer.

Each party had been given a "bird", so the actual report shouldn't take twice as long as the trip there.

However, only being capable of waiting was an irritating prospect for Margrave Branier.

"Depending on the situation in Larisa, I may need to broker an alliance with Nozan."

The Margrave rose from his chair and looked towards the map hanging on a nearby wall when he heard footsteps approaching from outside the room.

He'd expected the usual knock that should have preceded an entry, but it never came because the door was suddenly thrown open and a familiar face rushed into the room.

"Excuse my rowdiness, Wendelin-sama!"

The woman who rushed into the room was none other than Branier's personal assistant.

A foreboding feeling overtook the margrave's mind as it was rather unusual for her to enter his office unannounced and she was never one to panic.

In fact, he could not even think of even one situation which would cause her to act in her current manner.

The scouts had only left for the capital three days ago.

It was a bit too soon for a report to arrive..... that was the thought crossing Margrave Brianier's mind as he noticed of the person behind his assistant.

It was a young soldier dressed in the traditional uniform of messengers.

While the messenger was one of his own, before Margrave Brainier could open his mouth, the soldier closed his eyes and began shouting his message.

“The capital city of Larisa is currently besieged by a large number of mysterious undead! Their exact numbers are unknown, but it’s expected to be at least two hundred thousand! The King requests that the brave Margrave send reinforcements!”

With his message delivered, he let out an audible exhale before sucking in a large volume of air.

The content of his message was overwhelming.....

“What did you say!!?”

Margrave Brainier’s eyes bulged and the veins in his forehead began to pulse as he tried to gain confirmation from the messenger.

The capital was threatened by two hundred thousand undead..... it was a situation where anyone would ask for confirmation, but even a hardened veteran would’ve been unable to provide a coherent answer in the face of the Margrave’s current intimidating figure.

Even if the undead spontaneously began cropping up in above-average numbers, two hundred thousand of them suddenly appearing defied common sense.

There was a historical precedent that some corpses left on old battlegrounds would occasionally rise as undead, but their numbers rarely exceeded the hundreds, let alone thousands.

To begin with, the numbers just didn’t add up. In this world, when two forces engaged in territorial dispute, they would prepare an average of two thousand troops.

“What type of undead are these two hundred thousand composed of?”

Even though Branier had broken out in a cold sweat, he forced himself to ask the questions that needed to be asked.

The reports on the spider-human monsters suggested that they might be some kind of undead, given their rotten human halves and that their bodies disintegrate upon being slain.

It was the worst case scenario if two hundred thousand of those spider-human monsters were besieging the capital. Every human nation would be at risk of being destroyed if that was the case.

“According to the messenger from the capital, the majority of the horde were armored undead soldiers, while there were a few spider monsters mixed among their ranks!”

The margrave let out a relieved sigh as the worst case situation had been avoided, however, it was only a temporary comfort as their numbers still remained.

While the contents of the report could be confusing and improbable to most listeners, a certain legend was brought to the forefront of Margrave Branier’s mind.

“It can’t be..... the ‘Undead King’? But, the legends say he was destroyed by the empire.”

Once upon a time, the undead were mere servants to a legendary monster that wreaked havoc across the empire’s territory..... it was said his undead army exceed ten thousand.

Margrave Branier, shook his head to cease such thoughts.

Now wasn’t the time to look for a cause, there was a situation that had to be dealt with.

“..... By the way, if you came from Larisa, haven’t you arrived too early?”

When the margrave asked for an explanation, it was his assistant, not the messenger, who replied.

“I was informed of the matter earlier. Our scouts came across the King’s messenger seeking reinforcements as they traveled towards the capital. The messenger is the only one who returned, while the rest of the party went ahead to conduct reconnaissance. The messenger from the capital will be entering the territory shortly.”

Although she spoke quickly, the Margrave nodded his head as his assistant

seemed to have regained her composure.

He started to summarize the information in his mind and tried to plan out his next move.

“Realistically speaking, it’s impossible for reinforcements to reach the capital in time..... we may have to abandoned the capital all together, but that can’t be helped.”

The young soldier was shocked by the Margrave’s words.

Still, he kept his mouth shut as he understood that he wasn’t in a position to voice his opinion.

The Margrave raised an eyebrow at his behavior, before explaining his decision to his assistant one point at a time.

“There is little our forces can do against two hundred thousand undead. Even if the capital engages in siege warfare, that’s not a number of enemies that can simply be worn down. Then there’s the distance and time. Assuming I deploy a massive number of reinforcements, it will take days before they arrive.....”

The Margrave paused for a moment and looked at the map hanging behind him.

“It would take seven days for infantry, ten if you include preparation time.”

The assistant followed up the Margrave’s words.

The Margrave nodded in agreement.

The capital also sat in a large plain, making it impossible for a small army to fight a larger army there. Luring the enemy into the Uiri River and having the current sweep them away was a more plausible course of action.

However, it was hard to say for certain if that would work.

The enemy was undead, not human, so their behavior was bound to be different.

It was unknown if the current would have any effect on an army of two hundred thousand undead. This was hardly a situation where one could be optimistic.

If the spotted spider-human monsters had been scouts, then it was only a matter of time before the army set its sights on his territory.

Margrave Branier began preparing contingencies in case of such an event while he gave his assistant instructions.

“Send a message to the fort along the Uiru river. If they come across a unit of undead, abandon the fort and withdraw to the capital. Every available weapon in the territory should be gathered here. Inform every settlement that any crop that is ready for harvest should be brought here, effective immediately.”

The assistant was busy writing down the Margrave’s instruction on a corner of a document when another soldier entered the room.

“Milord, the bird from the Nozan messengers returned! This is the report.”

The soldier who had thrown open the office door saluted the Margrave before walking forward to present him with a small parchment.

“Birds” were one of the fastest means of communication in this world, but due to their natural homing instincts they could only send messages one way. Furthermore, it took time and effort to train the birds as carriers, making it impossible for them to become the normal means of communication.

“A report from the Nozan group? So soon.”

Even though its arrival added on to today’s surprises, Margrave Branier received the slip of paper and glanced over it.

The Margrave’s expression changed as he read the few sentences written there.

The assistant narrowed her eyes when she saw the Margrave’s strange behavior, who, detecting her curiosity, handed her the parchment so she could read it for herself.

As she received the message and scanned the contents of the report, Branier began rubbing his temple with his index finger.

“Apparently, the capital of Nozan Kingdom had already been attacked.”

Margrave Branier calmly nodded as she spoke the report aloud.

He’d expected as much, but then it was the rest of the report that had him wiping the cold sweat from his neck with the back of his hand.

Just what in the world is happening in this region?

“Innumerable sets of burnt armor were scattered across the plain outside the city walls. While one of the gates was destroyed, the city itself only suffered minimal damage, and restoration efforts are already underway.”

Though the Margrave’s expression remained calm, the joy in her voice at discovering a potential way out of this nightmare couldn’t be hidden.

Learning that a breakthrough had been made somewhere offered a sliver of hope for their own crisis.

“Was it just like the attack on Larisa? We can’t be sure about the scale, but if that was the case then Nozan Kingdom managed to survive off destruction.”

However, once she finished analyzing the situation from an objective point of view, she looked up towards her lord.

Even though he understood what she was getting at, the Margrave’s expression had become bitter.

If the Branier territory was unable to stop undead invasion, the two hundred thousand undead would overrun and destroy the region before traveling northwards and attacking the forces of Nozan Kingdom again.

Still, this also meant that there was a possibly upside for the inhabitants of the Branier territory.

The Nozan Kingdom and the feudal lords of the Branier territory had often clashed with one another, but the last thing they would have wanted was a large

undead invasion, making them open to a temporary alliance.

After all, it was literally impossible to negotiate with this kind of enemy.

Even if an alliance couldn't be formed, they might have been willing to help alleviate the worst of the invasion out of sheer self-preservation. Although, with the current situation..... it would be much better for Nozan if the Branier territory was wiped off the map.

In the worst case scenario, Nozan was confident in their countermeasures against the undead. If that was the case, they would most likely reject any pleas for aid from the Branier territory.

Without their support, the Branier house would be left to fend off the two hundred thousand undead alone.

The very same territory which had once belonged to Nozan Kingdom, before it had been conquered during an invasion.

All the Nozan Kingdom had to do was wait until they were defeated and wipe out the undead, essentially reconquering the territory with relative ease.

No, they would come into possession of the entire Salma Kingdom, since Larisa would have been destroyed at that point.

The capital of Salma Kingdom was a port city, so the nobility might be able to escape via ship, but even if they return, they would lack the soldiers and power necessary to oppose the Nozan Kingdom.

Though he tried to form countermeasures once more, the Margrave sighed after imagining the dim future.

“Even if I do that, nothing will happen unless I act. I'll personally have to act as a messenger to the Nozan Kingdom's capital. If we can't join hands then everything will be lost, and the people will be forced to evacuate. We need to make the necessary preparation, time is of the essence.”

Margrave Branier looked towards the ceiling to shake off his fatigue, before turning to his assistant and giving instructions.

“When I depart as messenger, you and the Knight commander shall lead in my place. The two messengers here will follow your orders. She makes the decisions, understood?Salma Kingdom might not even be on the map by this time next year. Whether or not the Branier territory survives rest on the shoulders of everyone here.”

The two messengers could only gulp audibly as they listened to the Margrave.

“I’ll be off.”

With a brief send-off, Margrave Branier grabbed his favorite cloak and briskly left the office.

Chapter 06: Meeting with Nozan's King

Nozan's capital city, Soalia

A cubical tower had been built near the inner wall as a sort of command post in case the city needed to fight a defensive battle. It was a practical brick building that lacked any elegance.

The narrow pathways, little sources of natural light due to the small windows, and the relatively cramped room empathized the building's intended purpose.

A certain room in the building felt even more cramped the rest of them as the people gathered here sat across from each other.

Four people had taken a seat at a table, which wasn't a polished masterpiece like those you'd find in a palace, but crude board that sat atop two unstable legs.

Two of the seats were occupied by King Asparuf of Nozan Kingdom and his daughter, Princess Lille.

At their backs stood Zahar and Nina, the knights who had been charged with protecting the princess, while the country's ministers lined the wall.

On the other side of the table was the pointy-eared and lilac-skinned dark elf Ariane and a knight wearing silver full-body armor who fidgeted in the rickety chair beneath him..... in other words, myself.

Another person, a black-haired cat beastman dressed in black grabs, Chiome, stood behind us, holding Ponta to her chest.

Had it not been for Ponta, Chiome's dark attire would've made her blend into the background of the dimly light room. If one were to let their guard down, they would've lost sight of her.

In the silent room, it was Princess Lille who opened her mouth first.

"Allow me to introduce ourselves once more. This is my father and the King of Nozan Kingdom....."

“Asparuf Nozan Soulia. You have my sincerest appreciation for helping us through our country’s plight at my daughter’s request. Elves and beastman.”

King Asparuf interrupted his daughter by bowing his head and offering a self-introduction as well as an apology.

The King’s subordinates let out an audible gasp when they saw his behavior, but silence overcame the room once more as they all held their breath.

Personally, I wasn’t all that surprised by this.

The Hiruku religion, in which elves and beastmen were objects of disdain, was widely practiced in this country. The King had just lowered his head to members of those races, so I expected someone to complain about it, but the statesmen remained completely silent.

Occasionally, their gaze would focus on Ariane or me, but their eyes would dart away whenever one of us caught them.

Ariane’s shoulders shook and a small smile appeared on her face as she watched their behavior.

A little while ago, the three of us ended Palermo’s monstrous rampage, so they were naturally cautious..... no, they were terrified of us.

Honestly, our handling of Palermo gave us a convenient advantage in negotiations, seeing how the contempt I expected wasn’t present.

.....Haa, talks wouldn’t proceed if things were left as they were, so I took it upon myself to start our introductions.

“I am Arc Raratoia of Great Canada Forest. Beside me is.....”

“Similarly, I am Ariane Glenys Raratoia.”

Once I finished my introduction, Ariane gave her own brief introduction after I urged her with a look.

My eyes landed on Chiome and Ponta next, but while her cat ears slightly twitched atop her head, she remained silent and I had to introduce her.

“This is Chiome-dono.”

“Kyun!”

“..... and that’s Ponta.”

Ponta was self-asserting when I finished introducing Chiome, so I added her as well before I turned back to the King.

“So, let’s move straight to the main point.....”

The tension in the room rose at my declaration.

The gunboat diplomacy was a bit extreme, but I might as well make the most of it.

“You’ve already heard some of the situation from Princess Lillie, but we accepted her request to help liberate the capital. Although the level of support deviated from what was expected, the princess had agreed to a certain compensation. For the sake of our elven brethren and our beastmen allies, we don’t mind a bit of hardship.”

I cut off my words and gauged everyone’s reaction.

It was a brief explanation to inform the king that our efforts to rescue the capital had been done under Princess Lille’s employment, thus justifying our actions..... that was my intention anyway.

Several of the Kingdom’s ministers looked at the princess in utter bewilderment.

“I’ve heard about your reward from Lille. Of course, I intended to honor my family’s promises and deliver your earned payment since the beginning. However, are you certain there are no mistakes within the contract? So that everyone here may be informed, would you please reiterate what kind of payment you seek?”

Ariane gave me a sideways glance and a small gesture with her hand when King Asparuf boldly asked us about our demands.

“Our demands are as followed: First, we request entrance into this country’s treasury. And Second, the immediate release of all the elven and beastmen slaves, and that a penalty is enforced for anyone caught enslaving them in the future.”

I could hear the chatter picking up around us once I spoke the controversial demands set as our reward.

Since we were demanding a change of this nation’s laws in exchange for mercenary work, arguments were unavoidable.

..... However, we held the power to push for acceptance here.

“It is a reward for the efforts that insured your country’s survival..... it may be petty of me, but we’ve done the work to earn it. Our greed is in line with the effort we expended to make those demands.”

My eyes wandered towards Lille who was sitting across from me, as she slowly nodded her head in agreement with my remarks.

By simply referring to “your country’s survival” I was bolstering our position with our previous achievements while simultaneously wielding our abilities as a threat towards the very country indebted to us.

King Asparuf seems to have caught onto that, his smile remained as he responded in an agreeable manner, but the muscles in his neck strained against his skin.

“It’s ridiculous to consider that greed. The possession of elven and beastmen slaves is outlawed within our country. Emancipating the illegally possessed slaves is a rather cheap reward for us to provide.”

All chatter halted at the King’s statement.

.....I seemed to have drawn out a promise from the King.

Ariane and I locked eye with one another before she gave me a small nod.

It would be a good bargain to remove the deeply-root Hiruku religion as well..... No, there were already plenty of reasons to remove the Hiruku

Religion.

However, I doubted the religion would be purged even if we asked for it. In fact, the country might be divided into faithful church supporters and abolishers if I pressed the issue.

After all, the main reason for the current situation was me.

It was an angel who had annihilated the undead army..... Stories of “Michael” were bound to spread amongst the general populace.

Many of the city’s residents had been evacuated from the area between the inner and outer walls when it seemed like it would be turned into a battlefield, but those behind the inner wall witnessed the angel descending from the sky.

Of course, the soldiers who had been fighting on the second wall and the high-ranking ministers inside this room knew the truth. The greatly adored angel had descended on behest of an elf..... something no one would believe.

The angel that had appeared in front of the city’s inhabitants, they believed their god sent the angel in response to their plight. A multitude of citizens had witnessed Palermo’s demise and rumors of the cardinal staining his hand with evil had already started to spread as well.

Right now, the Hiruku religion was in a delicate position in the city.

It could be said that the faith in the upper echelons of the church had plummeted, but faith in the doctrine had increased for the people that witnessed the miracle.

What to do..... while I tried to figure things out, King Asparuf brought up the matter first.

“At that time, if Cardinal Palermo was to be believed, the reason he took on that horrifying form lies with the current Pope of the Hiruku religion. This is a very serious matter for us. The Hiruku religion has spread to many human country’s across the continent..... that those directly beneath the pope, the upper echelon of the church, are monsters is something none but those here would believe.....”

King Asparuf let out a large sigh as he spoke before leaning in close to me with an earnest expression on his face.

“I would like to ask you..... No, Arc-dono, it seems that Cardinal Palermo knew of you. It seems to me that you already killed another cardinal based on what I heard. Even though he looked human, you knew that he’d been a monster since the very beginning?”

Apparently, they wanted to know if we elves were aware of the Hiruku Church’s other dealings, such as this attempt conquest from behind the scenes.

However, I only met one other cardinal in Tajiento and defeated him by chance, we were only investigating the Hiruku religion because of what happened to Chiome’s brother.

While I was at a loss as to how to answer the question, Ariane unexpectedly voiced a reply.

“We encountered them before by chance.but, it was inevitable that we’d discover their secret.”

Her golden eyes took on a feral gleam as she stared down the people in the room, it was if she were daring them to challenge her.

Several people unintentionally filched back when they got caught in her gaze.

It was the same in the Rhoden Kingdom, Ariane had no mercy for elf and beastmen slavers, especially those in a position of power.

The only exception seemed to be human children.

It was rather fortunate that the one who’d contracted us had been princess Lille.

“.....What in the world do you mean?”

The King asked Ariane to expound upon what she said with a straight face.

“Though I’m am unfamiliar with the Hiruku doctrine, after seeing Palermo I can guess why they remove elves and beastmen from human cities. He might

have seemed human to you, but he was far from that..... we could tell that he'd been undead with a single glance."

The ministers swallowed and focused all their attention on Ariane after she said her piece.

Eventually, an old man standing along the wall timidly asked her a question.

"S-So, you're saying you knew Lord Palermo wasn't human on sight?"

"That's right. Even if an undead wears human skin, it won't slip past us. You people have been removing the eyes that can see through the monsters' disguises with your own hands, all for the sake of those monsters' doctrine."

Well, there was one person that hadn't been able to see through it, but let's keep that close to my chest instead of interrupting her.

Still, today's "Ariane-dono" was in a bad mood because of our surroundings.

Had she been practicing her speech about the "The Hiruku Church....." ever since we dealt with Palermo?

The old man lowered his head after receiving Ariane's criticism.

According to their doctrine, elves and beastmen were inferior races, there wasn't a single Hiruku follower that didn't see themselves as being above those two races, but that superiority complex had them dancing in the palms of the undeads' hands.

However, pushing them any further on the matter would only ignite even more hostilities against elves.

She was sitting next to me and they knew she had the power to sink sections of this city beneath the earth, so no one was brave enough to challenge her now.

Still, it was for the best that we move on.....

"Let's put that on hold for now, Ariane-dono."

She crossed her arms and remained quiet at my request.

“There is no doubt that Cardinal Palermo was the one who orchestrated the assault on the capital. Since we’re not concerned with the inner-workings of the Hiruku Theocracy, we only have a rough idea of their goals. No, you could say that this event has clued us in on their goals.”

King Asparuf held his breath as I changed topics and looked directly at him. Beside him, Lille clasped her hand together over her chest like a child listening to a ghost story.

“When I encountered Cardinal Charos..... he was on the verge of conquering a city through the use of undead and other monsters. Since there was a church in the city, I didn’t understand his reasoning, but it probably had something to do with the enormous number of undead that attacked this capital.”

“That.....”

Someone opened their mouth when they heard what I said but they quickly shut it afterward.

You couldn’t spontaneously create that many undead..... moreover, the armor and weapons were uniform in appearance, not something you’d find on undead scavenged from random battlefields.

Palermo had said that his power was something “the Pope had given me”, so that meant the pope could create undead himself.

The two cardinals were simply one type of monster the pope could create.

It was all about the available materials.....

“Then my brethren that are taken to the Hiriku Theocracy are.....”

When Chiome unexpectedly joined the conversation with that quiet question, I slowly nodded my head.

“They were probably turned into undead..... From what I heard in Rhoden’s port city Lanbaltic, the Theocracy has been purchasing a large number of criminal slaves recently. I was told that they would be put to work in the mines, but that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

For now, I simply spoke the conclusion that I had come to based off of the information I had on hand, how they would treat the Hiruku Theocracy from now on was up to them.

Lille's shoulders trembled and her eyes bulged when I said my piece.

"This is serious, father! The Hiruku church has to be removed at once!"

Asparuf turned to his daughter and tried to calm her passionate declaration.

"Wait, Wait, Lille! it's not that simple!"

Of course, it wasn't simple.....

To expel the deeply ingrained Hiruku religion from a country, you'd need to convince a majority of the proud believers to turn their backs on their faith.

It wasn't an easy feat to accomplish now that an actual angel had descended.

Rebellion was all but assured if they tried to force the matter with the royal family's power, and depending on the scale, it could result in them being overthrown.

And would the Hiruku religion just leave Nozan alone simply because their attack on the capital had failed?

Perhaps they were already preparing a larger force to launch the second attack, or they would simply apply pressure.

Even if they revealed the truth about the church to neighboring countries, how many would actually believe them..... in this world, which lacked means of communication, it would take days before the message even reached the heads of other nations.

Frankly speaking, they were in a check.

The people around us started to understand and frantically began voicing countermeasures and tactics to avoid the worst case scenario, however, even I could tell none of their suggestions would bear fruit.

There were no effective measures, but for those that lived under the Hiruku religion for so long, maybe it was impossible to think of any solution.

Still, there was no reason for us to proceed at our own discretion, so we might consult Dylan abo..... no, in this situation, we needed to speak with someone higher up.

“That’s it! Why not seek reinforcements from Rhoden?”

I heard one of the ministers suggest an interesting idea, but how realistic would it be to expect Rhoden to send reinforcements across the gulf?

In my heart, it wasn’t all that likely to occur.

“That..... should do, right?”

Lille’s eyes had become teary-eyed after hearing her father yell at her, causing me to switch towards cleaning up this discussion before asking for our demands to be met.

“Since your country is incapable of purging the Hiruku church right now, wouldn’t the next best thing be to announce the mastermind behind the crisis to the populace and start detaining clergymen for questioning? The fact that any of them could be an undead in human skin can be used as a valid excuse.”

The King began stroking his chin as he considered my suggestion, while Lille watched him with a frustrated expression.

Instead of replying, Aspauf gave me a stout nod to indicate he’d accepted my suggestion, despite the brevity of our acquaintanceship.

I honestly expected the King to criticize my proposal when he stared at me with a hard look on his face.

“When the questioning begins..... I suppose you’d like to be there to watch?”

Since it had been my suggestion, it was a reasonable question to ask.

Currently, the ability to detect the undead was limited to elves and beastmen, but I doubt there were any more hidden undead within the capital.

If you were an undead capable of mixing in with humans, they must have some will of their own. It's unlikely that any of those guys would've stuck around after Palermo's defeat.

Well, there was no reason to refuse selling this country a few more favors.

.....Still,

"You don't mind if I leave Ariane-dono and Chiome-done in my stead, do you?"

My gaze shifted between the two as I spoke, Chiome nodded her head in approval, while suspicion began to cloud Ariane's eyes.

"Hold on, what are you going to do after pushing this hassle on us?"

Although they were humans, calling a request from a country's king a "hassle", had me worry that they'll carry a grudge over it.

"I'll be clearing out the remaining undead in the city."

I rose from my seat, grabbed the 'Holy Shield of Teutates' with my left hand and rested the 'Holy Thunder Sword' over my right shoulder.

It wasn't like I was capable of distinguishing the hidden undead from humans anyway.

A more productive use of my time would be to help the soldiers clear away the undead that had breached the outer wall.

Since the majority of the credit for the annihilation of the undead army went to the angel I summoned, I figured I could compensate for that with a good showing now.

An elf activity taking part in the defense of the capital should dispel some of the negative assumptions the people had of elves, even though my elven nature was hidden while I still had my helmet on.

The King's face turned pale when he caught on to what I was suggesting.

“Arc-dono, I am grateful for the offer, but we’d like to have a city left standing.....”

The ministers who had been talking about future countermeasures along the wall stopped talking and simultaneously looked in my direction.

They were afraid I’d call down another angel to clear out the city, even though doing so would cause the reputation of elves to plummet.

“Do not worry, that isn’t something that I can recklessly call down. I’ll just be swinging this sword around.”

I gave the worried people in the room a brief explanation, asked Ariane and Chiome to meet me later, and left the room.

Ponta had been relaxing in Chiome’s arms up till that point, but she came flying after me with her wind magic, gracefully landing on her favorite spot.

“Kyun!”

“You wanna come too, Ponta?”

Ponta vigorously wagged her tail in response to my question.

There were a lot of soldiers stationed around the building once I stepped outside, the citizens that the knights kept at bay began pointing and chatting amongst themselves when they saw an unfamiliar knight leaving the building.

Well, the inner wall’s gate was still shut tight and the soldiers should be capable of handling the regular undead themselves. Therefore, for the sake efficiency, it would be best to focus on the remaining spider chimera.

I’ll probably be finished in the evening.....

With that thought in mind, I began making my way towards the gate.

Chapter 07: The Pope's Power

Before long, the sky above Soulia began to darken and eventually transitioned into the night of the seventh and last day of the siege.

I was standing atop a building that was taller than those around it, taking in the view.

Gently tapping the 'Holy Thunder Sword' against my shoulder, I sighed.

Beneath me, I could see several divisions of soldiers searching the cityscape.

Thanks to my widespread use of Dimensional Step I was able to preemptively deal with the spider-chimeras, keeping the casualties among the soldiers minimal.

Taking the high ground allowed me to easily spot the large bodies of the spider-chimeras.

Also, since Palermo had been the control tower for these guys, it was easy to dispatch them after he was gone.

I think I've slain a majority of the spider-chimeras, but it might be a couple of days before the inner wall's gates could be opened.

Soulia was a rather large area, with thousands of buildings covering the ground within the outer walls. The guards and soldiers didn't have enough manpower to search all of them and destroy the undead.

It was unlikely that the cleanup process would be completed quickly, even if the citizen were allowed to take part in a human wave tactic.

"Kyun....."

I heard Ponta's miserable cry atop my helmet while I had been scanning the streets below and watching over the soldiers.

It was almost dinner time.

With that thought, I decided to put today's search efforts on hold.

"You wanna go and see what Ariane-dono and Chiome-dono are doing?"

"Kyun! Kyun!"

Ponta's tail became lively when I told her that we were going back.

Bonfires had been lit along the city's inner wall, so I used those as a landmark to make my way back with Dimensional Step.

Once I was close enough, I dropped to the streets below and walked the rest of the way to the gate.

The soldiers on guards froze when I walked up and greeted them.

Was that a good or a bad reaction?

I passed them by and entered the small door next to the gate, two people were waiting for me once I made it past the wall.

"You're a little late, aren't you?"

"Good evening, Arc-dono."

Ariane and Chiome.

"Well, the city was larger than I expected, it might take several days to finish the job. How did things go on your end, Ariane-dono? Did you find anything in the church?"

After joining up with them and explaining how the search for the undead was going, the two shared a look and shrugged their shoulders when I asked them how things were going.

"We didn't find any other undead amongst those involved with the church. It's just....."

Ariane's somewhat tired voice trailed off before Chiome spoke up and continued where she left off.

“.....It’s just that some of the church’s members can’t be found. Either they’d been killed during the siege or went into hiding after Palermo’s death..... the details are unclear.”

While a few church officials had vanished, only one of them had probably been an intelligent undead.

“Our actions here, as well as in Tajiento, have probably been leaked to the Hiruku Theocracy by now.....”

The two of them nodded in agreement with my conclusion.

Palermo had a description of the person who killed Charos on the Southern Continent.

By now, we were under the careful watch of the Theocracy’s eyes or they were already planning a way to remove the obstacles in their way.

Although it was by my own doing, I became a famous person without even knowing it.

A crease appeared between Ariane’s eyebrows, which she started massaging with her index finger.

“The Pope of the Hiruku religion..... What exactly is his objective? Normally, a small group like us shouldn’t have caught his atten.....”

Ariane let out a sigh when her golden eyes fell upon me.

I shrugged my shoulders and chuckled as I watched Ariane’s response.

“That would normally..... be the case.”

The three of us were in possession of extraordinary strength..... we would need to be dealt with eventually.

“Kyun!”

..... Okay, three plus one.

While stroking the fur under Ponta’s chin..... I vaguely thought of a few

situations that three people couldn't handle alone.

Although the three of us could deal with the problems at hand, we were extremely short-handed.

As I thought about such things, I looked down at Chiome. She'd been quiet for a while and judging by her expression her mind was far away right now.

"Something wrong, Chiome-dono?"

Her cat ears immediately reacted to my question and she returned to her usual blank expression as she looked up at me.

"No... Its nothing, really....."

Ariane quietly gazed into Chiome's blue eyes after she gave an evasive response.

Their eyes were intertwined with one another, and eventually, Chiome spoke up again.

"Were my captured brethren among the undead soldiers I've slain?"

Ariane and I shared a look when she said that.

The majority of the undead soldiers appeared to have been skeletal in appearance, like me. It was possible that they'd been entirely composed of human bones..... which had probably been collected from corpses.

Although humans were the most numerous race, I couldn't say that elf and beastman corpses wouldn't be used if there were an abundant number of them available.

The Hiruku doctrine demanded the removal of elves and beastmen from human countries.

What became of the removed people..... didn't need to be said.

"I don't mean to say anything offensive, but if someone is turned to an undead, it might be for the best to put them to rest, rather than let them endlessly

wander the world.”

Chiome’s eyes moved down to her hands after she listened to what I said.

She was probably thinking of her brother Sasuke.

He had been turned into a tool of the Hiruku Theocracy, and she had been forced to cut him down herself..... so the Hiruku religion might be her archenemy.

Ariane placed a worried hand on Chiome’s shoulder, but while her ears twitched, Chiome said nothing as she looked up at Ariane.

Ponta’s ears also moved in sync with Chiome’s ears.

There was a moment of silence, but then someone chuckled and the tense atmosphere was lifted.

It came from Zahar, one of Lille’s royal guards.

“What are you doing here? We have yet to truly show our gratitude for your help today. Although it’s rather modest, the royal cooks have prepared a meal for all of you. In accordance with Ariane-dono’s request, your meals had been taken to her room.”

Ponta began puffing her chest in anticipation when she heard what Zahar said.

Ariane had a bit of a smug face when I turned towards her.

In order to have dinner with other people, I would need to drink the spring water to rid myself of my skeletal appearance, but that ran the risk of wearing off halfway through the meal.

I would have to decline the invitation in that case, but now I could thoroughly enjoy the meal made by professional royal chefs.

It felt as if I could hear the phantom growls from my absent stomach when I imagined a good meal after a long day’s work.

“I’ll arrange for someone to come fetch me once your meal is done. Since the

king has agreed to your first demand, permission to browse the treasury has been granted. Pardon my question, but are you really satisfied with merely having a look?”

Zahar couldn't seem to comprehend our choice, but Chiome vigorously nodded her head, and Ariane spoke on behalf of her friend.

“Thank you, but merely looking is not a problem. We're just searching for clues.....”

Zahar simply said “Is that so?” and nodded at her brief statement.

He probably thought that there was no need to get involved any further, and called out to the soldier who had been standing behind him.

“This guy will show you to your room.”

After finishing his business here, Zahar marched off as the soldier rigidly saluted him.

He must have a lot of things to do, considering his position.

We followed behind the mechanically moving doll that was our guide to our room and my mind wandered back to a certain topic.

Just who in the world was the Pope of the Hiruku religion?

Based on what I've seen, he appeared to be a necromancer.

Was it ironic that the pope was a necromancer, or was it a witty setting that had been chosen intentionally? In any case, a skeletal Heavenly Knight like myself shouldn't be calling the kettle black.

Moreover, if the Pope was like the necromancers in the game, they wouldn't be much of a direct fighter. Instead, they used their magic to create undead who fought in their stead. If someone used it correctly, it would be a power that could conquer the world.

It would be great if the undead that attacked the capital had been the entirety of his army, but that was unlikely, considering what happened in Tajiento.

.....there were so many unreasonable existences in this world.

With that thought in my heart, I sighed.

Chapter 08: Browsing the Treasury

Leaving the bread aside, we ate the majority of the meal.

It was a rarity for Chiome and Ariane to enjoy meals that were usually reserved for royalty, so they tried a variety of new things.

Ponta was already sleeping at the end of the table with a full stomach.

The one who ate the most must've been me.

While my skeletal body lacked any flesh, it conveniently allowed me to enjoy the sensation of eating with my fourth-dimensional stomach.

After an hour or so, once I finished enjoying the after-meal tea, the soldier who would lead us to the treasury arrived.

“I will lead you.”

The soldier's movements were rather jerky as he saluted us.

Ariane released the kind of satisfied yawn that accompanied a full stomach.

She carried a sleeping Ponta in her arms, whose belly steadily rose and fell as her paws occasionally twitched.

Chiome had her usual blank face, but she rubbed her stomach as if she had eaten a little too much.

The soldiers lead us through a complex maze of passageways and corridors within the palace.

At the beginning, I had assumed that with every turn to the left or right we would be going towards the higher parts of the palace, but halfway through we began descending a flight of stairs and Ariane began to question our guide.

Apparently, for security's sake, a complex network of passageways had been built into the castle. Since we were talking about the national treasury here, I guess it would be inconvenient if invaders could find it easily.

Moreover, our guide had been replaced at certain sections of the trip, so not even the guards were fully aware of the entire castle's layout.

It was a simple but effective security measure.

(Sasuke-dono was able to find the treasury in this place.....)

Chiome puffed out her chest beside me when I whispered in amazement at the fact that Sasuke had managed to break into this place.

In fact, I was starting to doubt it was even possible to traverse this labyrinthine maze, avoid being detected by the various guards that filled said maze and escape undetected.

Had it been me, I would've definitely been detected by the guards and only manage to gain access to the treasury after being forced to deal with every single one of them.

Spying and sneaking around were completely uncharacteristic for me after all....

When we arrived at the door leading to the treasury, I remembered that it hadn't been that long ago that I'd been pursuing a thief.

We were probably in the palace's basement.

The echoes of our footsteps created by the thick stone walls and pavement meant that the guards stationed at the treasury's doors knew we were coming before we arrived.

The passage must have been designed this way to act as an early warning system.

After being urged by our guide, the guards opened the door and we were lead into a slightly wider passage than the one we'd just been in.

At the center of the passage was a person I was becoming very familiar with.

One was Princess Lille.

Instead of the simple dress she wore when we first met, she was now wearing an extravagant sky-blue outfit one would expect a princess to wear.

Her golden curls were held up by jewel-encrusted clips, exposing more of her neck as a result.

Her two guards, Zahar and Nina, stood behind her.

Unlike the basic military uniforms they had worn throughout our journey, the two now wore decorative sashes adorned with medals and badges over more pristine uniforms.

It appeared that they were to be our supervisors while we were in the treasury.

However, I still had to ask Lille why someone important like her was here.

“Lille-dono, whatever are you doing here?”

“I was the one who hired Arc-dono and the others. Thus, it is my responsibility to see that you receive the compensation promised! Father has already approved of this!”

She puffed out her chest and spiritedly answered my question.

When I looked at her two guards, Zahar had a slightly frustrated expression. I could tell that she must have stubbornly worn down the King until he allowed her to come.

“Besides, there has never been a situation where guests were allowed into the treasury, therefore father determined that having a member of the royal family accompanying you will set precedent for future occasions.”

I found myself nodding along to her words.

After all, there were various origins for royal customs.

Although this situation was a part of the reward the princess had promised us, wouldn't it be rather troublesome if they needed a precedent to allow outsiders into the treasury in the future?

A commoner like myself couldn't comprehend that logic, but Ariane on the other hand, who had been raised in an elven village, showed them a degree of understanding.

"So, we will promptly show you the treasury. I doubt any of you will steal anything, but we'd appreciate it if you remain within our sight as much as possible."

The three of us nodded along with what Zahar had said.

I had no desire to steal anything, besides neither Ariane, Chiome or I were armed at the moment, while Zahar and Nina were armed and probably had the means to deal with anything that came up.

Normally, one wouldn't think of stealing in this situation.

After nodding, it seemed that we were finally able to enter the place where the country's treasure was held.

While our main goal was to retrace Sasuke's footsteps, for some unknown reason I found the prospect of venturing into a treasury exciting.

The treasury's actual door was located at the back of the passage.

With all its metallic reinforcements, the gate-like door looked more like something you would expect to find in a fortress instead of on a treasury.

Six guards stood in front of the gate, the narrowness of the passage causing them to stand side by side, with no gaps between them.

The guards bowed their heads to Lille before she handed them two keys, which they proceeded to insert into lumps of metal on the door.

Two shutters snapping open echoed through the area before guards started prying the large gate open.

I was truly impressed by both such an airtight security system and Sasuke's ability to get past all of it. However, Zahar and I shared a look and he seemed to pick up on my train of thoughts.

“The security has been improved since the incident with the intruder.”

It was an understandable situation.

They hadn't been as thorough with their security before.

Probably due to a history of no issues, they had assumed that no thief would ever be able to break in, but one ninja had forced them to reevaluate their entire system.

..... It must have been a terrible time for the guards that had been on duty then.

One of the guards entered the dim treasury and probably used a magic tool of some kind to illuminate the room.

“Please.”

Upon Zahar's request, Lille was the first to enter the treasury.

Gorgeous pieces of artwork and luxurious sets of jewelry lining the walls of the room..... wasn't what we found.

Instead, there was a sculpture, probably chiseled by some famous sculptor, whose only visible part was the base because the rest of it was covered by a large cloth.

The paintings had all been packaged and arranged side to side, so there was no way to see the paintings themselves.

Jewels and coins weren't simply left out in the open since the shelves that lined the walls were filled with wooden chest of various shapes and sizes.

The room itself was built out of beautiful and sturdy stone, crude light-emitting magic tools were wrapped around pillars across the room, and there was a distinct lack of decorations.

It looked more like a large warehouse instead of a treasury.

The hidden room of Diento's lord had felt more like a treasury than this place.

After gaining permission, I began looking through the chests and confirmed that they were indeed treasure chests.

The contents of the chests were quite varied, some were filled with gold and silver coins, others had jewelry and decorative items wrapped in cushioning material, one had a twisted root whose value I couldn't begin to guess, and some even had black coconut-like fruit.

"Hmm....." "Kyuh."

I went around the warehouse trying to trace Sasuke's steps, but I haven't come across any clues yet.

I couldn't expect an on-the-spot inspection in this world, and it wasn't like I could find some trivial item and start making wild but somehow accurate inferences as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

In that regard, it was a stroke of luck that I came to this city and crossed paths with Palermo.

When I took a quick break, I noticed that Lille had been staring at me with a strange look on her face, as she watched me wandering through the treasury.

The act of merely browsing a treasury must have been incredibly strange to her, and I had no idea what I was doing myself, so I didn't know what to tell her.

Halfway through the search I checked in with Ariane and Chiome, but they hadn't found anything either.

The treasury was filled to the brim with items, but since no dust had built up there were no footprints to follow.

Even when I ran my finger along a shelf it came away clean.

"Quite clean, isn't it....."

Zahar had been watching my behaviors before he provided an explanation for the question that had been forming in my mind.

"After the break-in had been discovered, inventory was taken to determine

what had been stolen, and it appears that the treasury was cleaned at the same time.”

I stared back at him for his casual answer.

“Do you have the list of the treasury’s contents?”

While a bit confused by my question, Zahar nodded his head and led us to a bookshelf in the corner of the treasury.

I thought they were prohibited spell books at first, but most of the books were item catalogs and entry logs.

They were quite a lot of documents and there wasn’t enough time to go through them all. As I flipped through one of the book’s pages, Lille shared something really interesting with me.

“I heard nothing was taken from the treasury, but that some of the inventory records had been meddled with. Now, which one was it again.....?”

One of the guards stepped forward and hand me the book that Lille had started searching for on the shelf.

“If I’m not mistaken, the beginning of this book was damaged because of improper handling.”

I scrolled through the book I received until I came upon a familiar image.

“Chiome-dono.”

Chiome stopped what she’d been doing when I called for her, and her blue eyes bulged when she saw the image.

Chapter 09: A Careless Remark

The drawing that accompanied the item description catalog was that of a rhombus-shaped jewel.

While a description of the jewel was written beside the drawing, I could tell that it was one of the Blade Heart Clan's 'Spirit Contract Crystal'.

“Zahar-dono, is the jewel recorded here still within the treasury?”

After showing him the drawing in the book, Zahar looked it over before gently shaking his head.

“Unfortunately, this item is no longer held here, it seems to have been gifted to the Hiruku Theocracy some time ago.”

Chiome and I immediately understood what he said meant.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Sasuke had been the one to break in and escape.

After reading the treasury's records, he left for the Hiruku Theocracy and fell into the Pope's hands..... that was a rough estimate of what happened at least.

Chiome's eyes had been focused on the 'Spirit Contract Crystal's drawing ever since I showed it to her, but she slowly closed them as thoughts of her departed brother overwhelmed her.

Nina suddenly stepped forward with a grimace on her face when she saw the somber atmosphere, her hand rested on her sword and she glared at Chiome when she opened her mouth.

“I thought it was a bit strange, but you're searching for that beastman that broke into the treasury, aren't you? That vagrant broke into the royal family's treasury! What's your relationship with that thief!?”

Faced with her threatening attitude, Lille's face went pale as she looked between Nina and me, her eyes swimming as she tried and failed to come up with an excuse for her guard.

Nina must have realized that she was no match for Chiome, yet she confronted her anyway. You could see her trembling hands from here.

Did her serious personality allow her to ignore this difference in strength, or was her prejudice against beastmen blinding her judgment?

Zahar must have had a general idea of what we'd been looking for, but had pretended to not having noticed anything up 'till now. He tried to reel Nina's behavior in but Chiome shut him out before he could say anything.

".....Are you gonna do something to us, now that you know we're looking into the thief's actions?"

A new cold fire was ignited in Chiome's blue eyes, the air around her literally dropping to the point where her breath became visible.

The moisture in the air started forming ice crystals that reflected the light from the treasury's magic tools.

Nina and the others knew of Chiome's abilities from our fight with Palermo.

While she looked like a young girl, her ability wasn't something that could be overcome by one or two human knights.

Like frogs caught in a serpent's glare, fear froze the people around us in place.

Nina's presumptuous questioning had the misfortune of bringing Chiome's sorrows and regrets over Sasuke's death at the hands of the Hiruku to the surface.

The stone floor froze over when Chiome took a single measured step forward.

The unpleasant sound of ice breaking and reforming echoed throughout the room.

"Do you know how that jewel found its way into this treasury? Why do you think my brethren are forced to hide in the mountains, lest they be placed in chains in human towns? Do you have any idea how many of my people have been hated, chased and captured by humans?"

“Th-That.....”

Her voice was quiet and nearly silent, yet was seeped in icy blood lust.

Nina choked on her own words as cold sweat ran down her neck.



I felt an unseen blade I felt at my throat, causing my stomach drop because I knew something bad would happen if Chiome wasn't stopped.

"That's enough, Chiome-dono."

The chill slightly lessened when I called out to her.

"Princess Lille told me that the King will publicly declare to free the beastmen tomorrow. Chiome-dono, it's meaningless to take out your anger on Nina. Wouldn't it be more productive for you to watch your freed brethren and see what kind of treatment they received?"

Not really.....but there was meaning in asking questions I knew the answer to. If the justification behind her raised fist was shaken, her actions would become clouded by doubt.

"Lille-dono, it is tomorrow right?"

Lille picked up on what I was trying to accomplish and repeatedly nodded her head she affirmed my statements.

"Th-That's right! Tomorrow, Father will gather those within the capital in the palace courtyard and grant them their freedom!"

Chiome's eyes slowly closed as she took a deep breath.

Lille and the guards let out a relieved sigh as the frost along the floor melted and the ice particles dissipated.

"I am sorry, Arc-dono. I lost my head for a moment. I shall take my leave now."

Chiome give me a slight bow as she spoke before she left the treasury with gusto.

I set my eyes upon the now awake Ponta that was resting within Ariane's arms.

"Ponta, I have a job for you. Why don't you follow Chiome-dono?"

“Kyun!”

Understanding my words, Ponta leaped from Ariane arms and begin chasing after Chiome, her tail swaying vigorously as she ran.

After seeing Chiome disappearing beyond the second door with Ponta in hand, I turned back to Lille and apologized for that outburst.

“Sorry, the jewel drawn here is a treasure that has been passed down through her family. I don’t know under what circumstances this treasure found its way here, but considering the relationship between humans and beastmen it couldn’t have been pleasant ordeal, to say the least.”

Zahar chimed in with an apology of his own.

“We didn’t know it was this kind of artifact, please excuse our rudeness. Arc-dono.”

Lille rushed forward on the heels of Zahar’s apology and tried to apologize for her guard’s behavior.

“Save your apologies. Chiome-dono was slightly in the wrong here as well.”

We couldn’t allow our compensation to be placed at risk.

Many were still left in a state of shock, so I did my best to wave the incident away while I had the chance.

Tomorrow, the beastmen would be released and it would become illegal to enslave them within this country ever again. Still, the promises of tomorrow won’t heal the rift between the races today.

Those who have been enslaved, the slavers and those who resisted slavery couldn’t simply mend their relationship with one another. The scene between Chiome and Nina will likely crop up in various places from now on.

“F-Forgive us, Arc! I’ll be sure to properly discipline Nina later!”

Despite my efforts, Lille rushed to my side and apologized for Nina’s blunder, her gray eyes stained with tears as she looked up at me.

Seeing her small master pledging on her behalf, Nina got ashamed of herself for her own shallowness. She bowed her head deeply and apologized on the spot.

Chiome, along with Ponta, was waiting for us not far from the treasury's entrance.

"Sorry, Arc-dono."

Chiome's ears and tail were downcast as she apologized to me, but I brushed it aside as if nothing had happened.

"What is there for Chiome-dono to apologize for?"

Her response was to simply shake her head and avoid eye contact.

Ponta purred and rubbed herself against Chiome's chest in an attempt to cheer her up.

She may have been a battle-tested warrior, but she was still a young girl. It seemed that she had yet to learn how to react to subjects that struck a personal nerve.

In a way, it was rather assuring that she still had such an aspect in her personality.

"There are lots of things to take care of in the capital and the hidden villages. A lot of problems can spring up if the supplies aren't adjusted to account for the new arrivals. It seems I'll be rather busy."

Chiome chuckled at my attempts to brighten the mood by bringing up tomorrow's schedule and lamenting my workload.

"Let's get to bed, today was rather tiring. They've already provided rooms for us in the castle, but how about we spend the night at the village?"

Ariane must have judged that Chiome would be uncomfortable staying in a room prepared by humans and suggested that we returned to our village with my magic.

However, Chiome embraced Ponta and rejected the proposal.

“I don’t have a problem here. I’ll be heading to bed early in preparation for tomorrow.”

Ariane looked at Chiome’s face until she was satisfied with what she saw, and grabbed her by the arm.

“Alright, Chiome-chan and I will share a bed tonight. Of course, Arc will be in another room entirely.”

Ariane laughed and talked as if everything had been decided, with Chiome nodding along instead of arguing with her.

Since she still had a tight hold on Ponta as they walked off, it appeared that I would be sleeping alone tonight. So I was left standing there in the moonlit corridor.

Chapter 10: Three Heroes + One

Unfortunately, there was no way to say that the day the beastmen would be liberated was a beautiful one. The weather was the complete opposite of what such an occasion called for, with thick gray clouds hanging in the sky above the capital.

Since the city hadn't been cleared of undead yet, many people were forced to stay in uncomfortable tents camps behind the inner wall.

However, the faces of the people didn't reflect the gloomy atmosphere.

Stories of how the undead horde outside the city had been wiped out had spread throughout the populace, there was even talk among the citizens about forming search parties to hunt the remaining undead.

In fact, many citizens had already volunteered to help destroy the remaining undead, the atmosphere was far from depressing and full of energy and liveliness.

According to Zahar, rumors of the beastmen being set free had intentionally been spread throughout the populace whenever talks about rebuilding the city came up, although the full story hadn't been leaked.

I was wondering why they took such measures, but he politely explained the circumstances behind them to me.

"Before we arrived to rescue the city, the capital lacked the necessary manpower to defend the city, so all the beastmen slaves and those gathered for the church had been mobilized. Originally, it had been planned to hand them over to the church after the crisis had passed, but now there's no need to comply with their demands since the cardinal was exposed."

Zahar had an unpleasant expression on his face as he spoke.

"Still, it's possible that the beastmen will try to escape the capital. It's likely

that some of them have already fled after yesterday's battle had concluded. The King had to spread rumors in advance to prevent more of them from recklessly trying to escape the city."

I nodded and muttered an affirmation after listening to what he had to say.

It would be an easy feat for the physically endowed beastmen to scale the inner wall and escape now that most of the undead were slain.

Still, it was a dangerous action to take nevertheless, enduring slavery didn't leave much physical endurance in a person.

Ariane, Chiome, Ponta, Zahar and I were currently in the reception hall of a guest mansion that had been built near the palace, watching the garden below through a window.

Normally, the general public wouldn't be allowed inside the royal palace, but a multitude of beastmen had been gathered in the large garden.

There were quite a few of them, though Zahar said that they didn't exceed more than a thousand people.

It was obvious that the beastmen who voluntarily made their way here came to witness, with their own eyes and ears, the declaration that would affect their place within this country.

Then they'd be able to report back to their peers what they witnessed.

Chiome had been immersed in deep thought ever since she saw her brethren file into the garden.

Zahar gave her a sideways glance before bringing up what had happened yesterday.

"Chiome-dono, there is no excuse for Nina's rude behavior yesterday."

He was trying to apologize again, but Chiome's blank expression remained unchanged. A look from Ariane told me that I would be our representative today.

"Chiome-dono doesn't seem too worried about it, so don't worry about it

Zahar-dono.I haven't seen Nina-dono today, is she with Princess Lille?"

Zahar scratched the back of his head and smiled bitterly when I asked about her whereabouts.

"She was punished by Lille-same after the incident and is still reflecting on her actions....."

I heard a small sigh for the two other people listening to him.

When I looked at the two people in question, their eyes were suspiciously directed at the horizon.

".....So, Nina-dono was serious about it."

I found myself imagining the still pre-pubescent princess chastising the female knight with a whip in hand, as I glanced back out the window.

The thought of Nina shouting "I'm sorry!" after the whip bit into her back made me blush and apologize in my heart for having such a daydream.

Either way, it seems Lille could be entrusted with Nina's punishment, so I cleared those disgraceful thoughts from my head and asked Zahar another question.

"Zahar-dono, why is it that you don't carry any malice towards the beastmen?"

Hearing my question, he offered me a small, self-depreciating smile.

"Unlike Nina, I don't belong to the nobility. When I was a child, living in a small village, I met and befriended a beastman child and his community by chance in the nearby forest..... I earned their favor by informing them where and when a slave hunt would occur."

As Zahar told me this, he nodded slightly and had a somewhat envious look on his face.

"Is that so....."

I wanted to ask him what his beastmen friend was up to now, but given his expression, it was probably better to avoid digging into what was obviously an unpleasant topic for him.

Eventually, guards carrying trumpet-like musical instruments silently entered the garden and began to blow into them.

The chatter below came to a stop as everyone's attention was focused on one location.

King Asparuf, accompanied by two royal guards, stepped onto the balcony that overlooked the garden after the song played for fanfare came to an end.

One of the guards announced the King's arrival with a shout.

“King Asparuf Nozan Soulia, of the Nozan Kingdom!”

The majority of the beastmen gathered in the garden had never seen the King before, so whispers immediately sprung up within the crowd.

Meanwhile, King Asparuf slowly walked up to the railings and looked over the beastmen that had gathered down below before he began speaking.

“Thank you, everyone, for gathering here today. As you all know, our country faced an unprecedented crisis just the other day. While our fate was in God's hand, it was due to the effort of the beastmen that we survived. On behalf of the country, you have my utmost gratitude.”

The beastmen looked at one another at the King's show of appreciation.

They were confused because a human king, the apex of the nation, had just personally thanked beastmen for their help.

However, there were those who were disgusted when they heard the king's words.

They must have been thinking that the only reason the king was being so generous was that the country had been in danger. Perhaps they thought that the words of a conniving king weren't credible.

After all, only the bare minimum had come to this place since the majority of the beastmen assumed that this was a trap meant to recapture them.

Not to mention, that none of the armed guards that surrounded the garden spoke out against what the King was saying.

“You all have probably heard that the undead who were besieging the city have been almost completely annihilated. They vanished so abruptly that I was certain they would return to the capital in larger numbers.”

That rumor had definitely spread amongst the people..... it was said that almost every undead had been slain and the King confirming it to be true caused a small cheer to raise from the crowd.

“During this crisis, my daughter, Princess Lille became a messenger and invited three heroes from other countries to fight on our behalf. It is because of their strength and ability that I stand before you today. I swore to provide them the greatest reward their efforts warrant.”

The noise became louder as Asparuf continued to spin his yarn.

Unsurprisingly, the King proclamation that three people were being rewarded for their achievements had everyone looking around in confusion.

The crisis the capital faced wasn't a situation where just three people would have been able to make a difference..... some were already starting to doubt that the attack had even occurred.

However, those who had actually taken part in the war effort were quick to refute those claims since they'd actually seen the innumerable horde of undead besieging the city.

Besides, the primary source of their unease was why they had been gathered here to listen to the achievements of others.

For them, the three heroes and their being here were incompatible with one another.

Moreover, Princess Lille had been expressly identified as the messenger who had brought the heroes here..... if said heroes hadn't been non-human

mercenaries, they would've had no choice but to flee, considering the state of the country.

However, neither the inhabitants of the capital nor the citizens of the kingdom had been gathered in the garden.

The hundreds of beastmen who had gathered here were equivalent to the students of a single school gathering for an assembly, so I was a bit reluctant to receive the hero's mantle.

I would also like to refrain from being introduced to the rest of the capital's populace like in such a manner.

"The reward which they asked for..... was the immediate release of all elven and beastmen slaves. Furthermore, they insisted that we outlaw the unjust enslavement of either of those races and that a befitting punishment is enacted for anyone breaking this law. Here and now, I swear that from this day forward, that the provisions of human law shall be applied to beastmen and elves as well!"

There was a moment of silence after Asparuf's declaration before the crowd of beastmen erupted into cheers as the king quietly looked on.

It must have been difficult, given the conditions they faced till now, but the rumored slave emancipation had just been announced by the King himself.

Apparently, the story was easier to accept when there was an existence that thrust the liberation condition upon the country.

Naturally, the topic moved on to the three people who had laid down that condition.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce these heroes! The elven knight from the Great Canada Forest, Arc Raratoia-dono! The elven warrior, Ariane Glenys Raratoia-dono!"

After Asparuf's introduction, Ariane and I stepped onto the balcony and stood before the crowd below.

People immediately began to talk amongst themselves when we came out.

The course of this event had been prepared in advance, but I was unaccustomed to being the center of attention.

Though I always caught the crowds' attention when I walked down the street, coming off the King's introduction and the sheer difference in scale was unnerving.

Some of them seemed to have seen our fight with Cardinal Palermo and began speaking about Ariane and me.

“Can we believe that elves would assist humans in a crisis?”

“Hey, hey, is that guy in the armor really an elf? I’ve never heard of an elf wearing armor before.”

Various people pointed at us and doubted my elven nature, or questioned why elves would lend humans a helping hand.

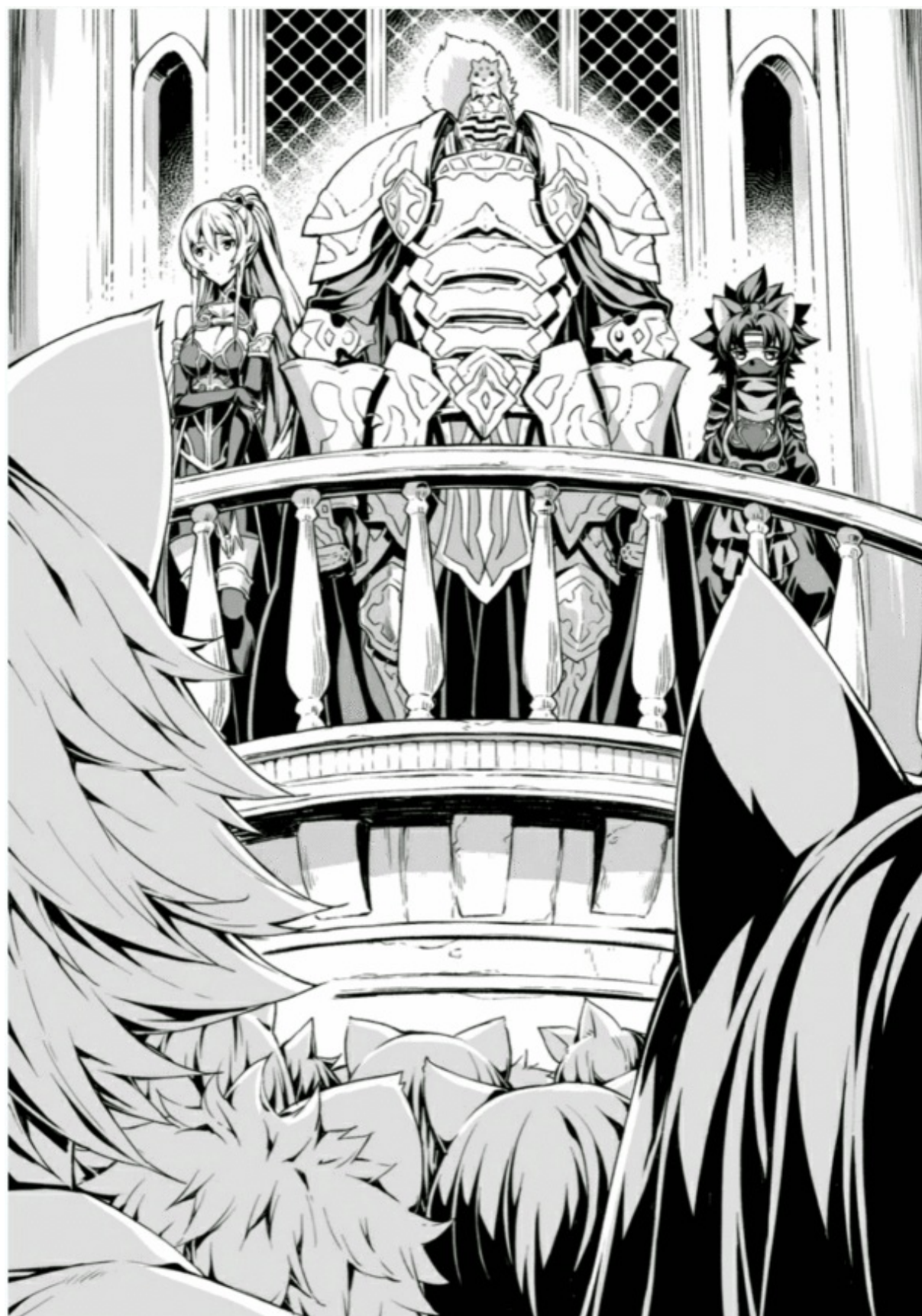
“Why is he hiding his face in front of an audience?”

“Idiot, it’s obvious. Not everyone wants to sell his face as a hero. He’s either trying to hide his identity, or he’s too ugly to look at.”

Someone in the crowd tried to ease the general worry, but their guesses were far off because there was only a skeleton in this armor.

“Finally, the representative of the Jin Shin Clan*, Chiome-dono!”

Chiome was the same as usual, but she was covering her mouth with her face mask. I wonder, was that to uphold her dignity as a ninja, or to hide her tension?



The ones below were stunned when Asparuf introduced Chiome.

“Did he say the Jin Shin clan?”

“Have they ever come to this country before!? Are we truly free!?”

As the name of the “Blade Heart Clan” spread among the beastmen, exhilaration began to take over their expressions, whereas I was surprised that they even knew that name.

Chiome’s tail swayed as she gazed upon the crowd below.

Asparuf was content with letting the celebration occur for a while, before ordering the minstrels to play a short piece to let him regain their attention.

“Those in the capital shall be the first to be released, and once the latest affairs are put in order, beastmen in the surrounding cities shall be freed as well. Furthermore, Chiome-dono is recruiting beastmen to migrate to new lands. If you are interested in the offer, details will be posted in the near future. That is all.”

With Asparuf’s declaration complete, the people excitedly discussed everything they’d heard as they left the garden under the guards’ instruction.

I started up a conversation with Chiome-dono while seeing them off.

“Migrating to new lands..... how many are you expecting to come, Chiome-dono?”

“Fifty to a hundred at first..... since the new village isn’t ready to accept normal people, men that can survive harsh environment will be given top priority.”

Ariane simply shrugged and sighed at her answer.

“Looks like the place will become even stuffier, isn’t it.....”

When I remembered the current state of the village, I realized it might be a dangerous place for Ariane to visit.

I doubted they could do anything to Ariane, but the number of injured we'd have to deal with when she lost her patience with them wouldn't be worth it.

A panicked guard rushed to the King's side while I was thinking that potential situation over.

Zahar promptly stopped the guard and spoke to him in a business-like manner.

"Halt! State your business with the His Majesty."

"Messengers from Salma Kingdom's Branier Territory have arrived, Margrave Branier requests an audience with the King. How should we proceed?"

Asrapuf stepped forward with an incredulous look on his face when he heard that report.

"Wait, are they really messengers from the Branier territory?"

Under the King's direct questioning, the guard retrieved a letter from a breast pocket and began speaking in a high pitched voice.

"I beg for your forgiveness! I forgot about the letter the Margrave's people had been carrying! And to answer your question, the people claiming to be messengers rode under a banner that definitely had the Margrave's coat of arms!"

Zahar took the letter from the guard and confirmed the wax seal pushed onto it.

Ariane realized something after watching their exchange play out.

"Isn't that the territory we passed through on our way here? The place where that group of soldiers had been attacked by undead....."

Zahar and I both remembered when she said that.

Honestly, yesterday had been so busy that that felt like a distant memory now.

Zahar quickly went to King Asrapuf's side, whispered what he knew into his ear, and stepped back after handing him the letter.

“..... What, Lille gave that kind of order? Did the monsters enter the Margrave’s territory because they were chasing Lille, or for some other reason? The Margrave is different from the ignorant nobles in their capital, maybe he already figured out that Lille has crossed his territory. What is his intention.....”

Asrapuf muttered as he broke the way seal and quickly read the context of the letter.

He was immediately shocked by what he read.

“What does Margrave Branier want??”

Zahar unintentionally questioned the king when he saw the change in the king’s expression.

Asrapuf remained lost in the letter for a moment before raising an eyebrow.

“It seems like they are about to face a crisis..... There’s no greeting, only a request to have an informal chat with me is written. Ignoring every formality as if.....”

The King’s voice trailed off as he set his eye upon the guard that delivered the letter.

“I will answer the Margrave’s request. I am sorry Arc-dono, but I’ll be taking my leave today.”

Asrapuf left in a hurry after apologizing for his abrupt exit.

“Hmm, something seems off about this.....”

“Kyun?”

Ponta tilted her head to the side when those words slipped from my mouth after the King’s footsteps became a distant echo.

Ariane didn’t seem to mind it and simply stroked Ponta’s tail.

However, Chiome’s cat ears stood straight up, signaling that she’d caught on to the same thing I had.

“I agree.....

Chiome and I looked towards the grey sky above the city, the low hanging clouds seemingly even more oppressive than before.

The King uses the Katakana for the name of Chiome's clan instead of Kanji, that's how they get Jin Shin clan instead of Blade Heart Clan.

Chapter 11: Meeting | Part 1

King Asuparf's reply to Margrave Branier's letter was drafted and sent out the same day it arrived at the capital.

Considering that the messenger had left for the most direct route to the Branier territory, the reply wasn't expected to reach the Margrave for at least five days.

However, that expectation was suddenly overturned because three days after the messenger had been sent out, Margrave Branier himself arrived in the capital.

"Given the distance, the Margrave shouldn't have arrived so quickly. Is this a trick?"

Zahar, who'd just been reporting on Arc's behavior in the city, voiced his concerns, but Asparuf seemed to disagree with him.

"No, visiting so many days in advance is proof to the authenticity of their stated purpose. He probably headed out without waiting for our response.."

Hearing the king's half-hearted explanation, Zahar silently bowed his head in agreement.

Certainly, if they'd sent a fake messenger, it would be wasted effort if they went and acted before their messenger returned.

The letter sent by the Margrave gave the impression that he'd been backed into a corner.

They couldn't even afford to wait for a reply from a country they'd had a history of hostility with..... this fact made the Margrave's visit all the more abnormal.

"My Lord, I have a bad feeling about this meeting with Margrave Branier....."

King Asuparf agreed with Zahar's glum assessment of the situation.

".....So do I. The meeting shall take place immediately. Take Margrave Branier to the official meeting room at once!"

At the King's order, one of the guards in the corner ran out the room.

Within minutes of the order being given both parties, who had decades of hostility between them, met for the first time.

They sat on the opposite sides of the small table in the center of the room and calmly evaluated one another.

While he was already middle-aged the King was the younger one of the pair..... however, one could see the dignity and strength of a ruler in his eyes.

Though calling cards of old age were visible on his face, the sharp eyes and battle-hardened body of a veteran soldier still remained.

They were trying to gauge one another other, but light smiles remained on their faces.

..... If you ever needed an example of a noble not devoted to filling their own coffers, then the Margrave's imposing figure in front of the king would be what came to mind.

..... In comparison to those nobles who were completely absorbed in factional struggles and their own pleasures, the King was like a dazzling light in a hazardous bog.

"Nozan's King, Asparuf Nozan Soulia."

"Margrave of Salma Kingdom, Wendelin De Branier."

The two shook hands after introducing themselves.

Besides those two, only Zahar, who was acting as Asparuf's guard, was present in the meeting room. Surprisingly, Margrave Branier attended without an escort.

“A request for an informal meeting was rather unexpected. No need for formalities, what’s your goal?”

The Margrave saluted the King before replying to his straightforward question.

“Thank you. Before I tell you, may I ask, how many monsters attacked Soulia?”

His gaze sharpened at the Margrave’s question.

However, the Margrave would be obligated to answer his question after receiving the information.

“It was about one hundred thousand.”

The Margrave unintentionally slapped his knee and the corners of his mouth rose when he heard the King’s answer.

“That’s good news. It may be rude of me, but surely the defenders of this city have suffered recently. It’s a miracle that a hundred thousand monsters were defeated with such little damage, but how confident are you if they attacked in similar numbers again?”

The smile disappeared from the Margrave’s face, and he spoke in a low, tense voice. Asparuf quietly listened to what he said, since realizing why the Margrave would ask these things made him to break out in a cold sweat.

“.....Have they appeared there as well? Another large horde of undead..... How many?”

“Around two hundred thousand.”

The air in the room had become heavier when the King asked his question..... and the number the Margrave mentioned brought the conversation to a halt.

The three people in the room heard an audible gulp.

As if it were the signal he’d been waiting for, the Margrave spoke up again.

“Currently, a large force of undead is besieging Larisa, Salma’s capital. I lack the means to rescue the city..... even if I turned my territory on its head, I wouldn’t be able to come up with two hundred thousand soldiers. It would be foolish to try a rescue with such numbers. I came here because the only hope my territory and your country has of winning is if we cooperate..... Isn’t it?”

The Margrave’s sharp eyes demanded an answer from the King.

If he refused the Margrave’s proposal, then his territory would be consumed by the two hundred thousand undead. Whether or not those undead would then set their sights on this place..... it was a question he didn’t have an answer to.

Soulia had already attacked once, who was to say it wouldn’t happen again? It was possible.

“Certainly, a repetition of the previous outcome is unlikely”

The King released a large sigh as he spoke.

In response, the Margrave released the breath he had held when he heard the King’s answer.

“That’s reassuring! I know this is sudden, but can you tell me the strategy you used to repel the undead? It’s best to prepare for battle as quickly as possible. Based on the state of the wall, I think you used some sort of trap and fire magi.....”

The Margrave’s voice trailed off when he noticed the King’s poor complexion.

It was possible that the secret technique the King had used to fend off the undead horde wasn’t something that could be prepared on short notice..... at least, that was the impression the Margrave was getting.

However, the truth was something the Margrave never expected.

“We humans were incapable of doing anything against the siege. The capital stands today because of the efforts of two elves and a beastmen.”

The Margrave was left dazed by the King’s statement.

The Margrave hadn't heard anything about the Nozan Kingdom allying itself with elves or beastmen.

In the first place, the beastmen's numbers had dwindled since the Hiruku doctrine demanded them to be hunted down and gathered up as tributes by its neighboring countries. The majority of the elves isolated themselves in the Great Canada Forest east of Rhoden.

Could it be possible that.....

"Those two, were they from Rouen?"

The King shook his head and explained that the elves had come from Canada.

The story of three people rescuing Soulia from the brink of destruction was even more confusing, given that the saviors weren't even human.

Not even the experienced Margrave could hide the unrest sparked by that story.

"Wait, wait. Do you expect me to believe that two elves and a beastmen repelled a hundred thousand enemies?"

Even under the Margrave's intense scrutiny, there wasn't even a hint of ridicule or certainty about dealing with a future crisis within his gaze..... he only caught a glimpse of worry.

After a while, the King let out a deep sigh before calling out to Zahar behind him.

"Zahar, I apologize, but could you go see if Arc-dono would like to join us?"

Zahar bowed towards the King and left the room in a hurry.

The King asked the Margrave an unexpected question.

"By the way, Wendelin-dono, have you grasped the true identity of the enemy?"

It was a question that the Margrave had pondered before, but stopping the two

hundred thousand undead had taken priority over answering the question.

The overwhelming number of undead was connected to that question.

Normally it would be impossible for such a large number of undead to rise.

The legend of the “Undead King” was the first thing that came to mind, but the King shook his head when he told him so.

“My prime minister thought of that legend as well. However, if we assume the legend to be true then the Undead King should have been destroyed by the Empire. Perhaps they were unable to kill the Undead King back then and sealed him away instead. And now he’s been released upon the world once more.....”

The King paused for a moment and left out another large sigh.

“Be that as it may, this enemy is not from some uncertain legend. There is a clear entity responsible for innumerable undead sent after us. Our enemy is deeply rooted in the Hiruku Theocracy.”

When he was told who the real enemy was, Margrave Branier was left speechless.

The look in the King’s eyes told him that he wasn’t joking.

“.....What convinced you that the Hiruku Theocracy is behind all of this?”

He locked eyes with the King and asked him for the conclusive evidence that made him certain that identify of the enemy was really the last entity anyone expected.

The King informed him of everything that had occurred a few days ago..... the Margrave was left dumbfounded as he listened to the story of Palermo’s monstrous transformation and the truths the elves had revealed.

“..... So if we are to believe their words, then they can find them by sight and smell?”

The King nodded at the Margrave’s question.

“Only elves and beastmen have the ability to detect undead mixed in with humans. However, there aren’t many of them in this region anymore.”

The Margrave groaned after those words left his lips just before someone asked to enter the room.

Chapter 12: Meeting | Part 2

Following the the orders of his King, Zahar once again entered the room and bowed.

Three people entered the room behind him.

At the front of the group was a giant knight in silver full-plate body armor, but why was he wearing such luxurious armor? And what was that grass-colored, unknown animal sitting on his helmet?

If it wasn't for the wagging tail, one would mistake it for a helmet decoration from a distance.

Directly behind the silver knight was an unparalleled beauty who would attract anyone's attention.

The woman was a dark elf: her pointed ears, lilac skin, golden eyes and snow-white hair were things you'd never see among the elves of Rouen Forest.

However, the woman wasn't wearing a dress befitting of her beauty, instead she wore the garments of a soldier or mercenary and a leather breastplate with strange markings on it.

A silent girl of small stature was the one to bring up the rear.

Her entire body was wrapped in a concealing black garment, the triangular black ears atop her head and the long black tail attached to her waist were proof of her beastmen heritage.

The beastmen girl's clear blue eyes calmly flowed over the sitting Margrave, the pressure her gaze caused created wasn't something he could shake off easily.

The three of them carried an unusual atmosphere as they sat in the new chairs Zahar had prepared, their gazes glancing over the King and Margrave respectively.

“Wendelin-dono, allow me to introduce you. This is Arc-dono, Ariane-dono and Chiome-dono. These are the three we spoke of before, the ones who rescued my country.”

The Margrave’s gaze poured over each of them as they shook hands and exchanged greetings with one another.

It could be said that they were out of the ordinary in appearance and composition, especially the knight, who didn’t remove his helmet with the animal on it, although he was sitting.

A glimpse at King Asparuf revealed that he was absolutely earnest about this.

“I am sorry for asking you, Arc-dono. However, according to Margrave Branier’s testimony, the same crisis that threatened my country is fast approaching his territory. Somehow, an undead army twice the size as the one we encountered has attacked the capital of Salma Kingdom. In this situation, the Margrave fears that his territory will be consumed and that the army will place Soulia at risk again. I know it’s a complex situation, but can we rely on your power once more?”

The Margrave was surprised that the King had lowered his head to those of another race, but it convinced him that the King thought his country wouldn’t have survived without their power.

Moreover, even though the King had just informed them of an extraordinary threat twice as powerful as what they previously faced, they remained unfazed.

One of them, the dark elf women... Ariane merely looked displeased by this before she started talking with the knight, Arc.

“The last time it had been because of Lille-chan’s request that we involved ourselves with the fate of a human country, but this time it will be our own decision whether or not we meddle in this mess, you know?”

“Hmm. That may be so, but our conditions would be in vain if we allowed one of the few human nations willing to ally themselves with us to be destroyed, wouldn’t they?”

King Asparuf held his breath as he watched the conversation that would

determine the fate of a country play out.

Even though the Margrave didn't know how the trio managed to repel the undead, he could tell that the future of his country depended on their decision.

Therefore, the Margrave needed to say something to attract their interest. Something that would make them lend a hand to humans once more.

"Would you mind if I interject something? We have reports that some monsters which seemed to be some kind of scouts were moving towards Rouen forest, where Arc-dono's fellow elves are living. These things are probably intending to use the Branier territory as staging ground to march against them next. And from there against the Dimo Earldom."

Although it was mere speculation, it was something they must consider at least.

With that in mind the Margrave turned to the trio to gauge their response.

"Could they have been the ones who injured Rouen's warriors? Given the way Cardinal Palermo acted, there's a good chance that the horde will move itself towards the village.

When the Knight Arc voiced his thoughts, Ariane raised an eyebrow.

What Arc just revealed put the Margrave somewhat at ease.

The scale of the force that attacked Rouen was unknown, but the fact that their warriors had suffered casualties meant that they didn't have the same level of power as these three.

If anything, the trio's power should mark them as some kind of special forces.

In the first place, Margrave Branier had never heard of any elven warriors that possessed such power in the Rouen. It was the reason why the story of how a couple of elves and a beastmen repelling a hundred thousand undead was so unbelievable.

Though the Margrave didn't know the current relationship between the elves of Canada and Rouen, it shouldn't have been all that bad given what he was

hearing.

“Should that happen, wouldn’t the capital deploy its forces under the pretext of rescuing Rouen?”

Having said that, Ariane crossed her arms and showed a thoughtful expression, but Arc bent over and whispered something in her ear.

(Can’t the damage be mitigated if the elves take action first?)

(It’s foolish, but the issue is the village’s pride in their combat ability. Arc, if those with your level of power appear, a guardian Dragon King can take care of it.)

While it was meant to be a secret conversation, it was may as well have been a speech in this quiet room.

Existences called Dragon Kings were said to be at the apex of all life.

The topography itself vulnerable to change because of their tremendous power.

The fact that the elves could move such a being with a simple request made the Margrave dizzy.

While the Margrave was drifting in the whirlpool of his own thoughts, Ariane announced their decision.

“I do not believe that Canada will be all that concerned with the collapse of a single human nation. However, the continued existence of human nations and territories that acknowledge elves and beastmen as people will be more beneficial to us than the race dying out. If you can prove your sincerity, you might convince the elders to intervene.”

The King and the Margrave shared a look after hearing what she said before the Margrave asked her what she expected.

“What kind of proof?”

“Mostly the same conditions imposed on Nozan Kingdom: all enslaved elves

and beastmen shall be released and any unjust slavery is to be prohibited.”

“I can accept that. On the honor of my family’s name, I promise to fulfill those conditions.”

The Margrave agreed to Ariane’s conditions without a moment of hesitation.

Since the Margrave’s territory was connected to the elves’ Rouen Forest, he’d kept a watchful eye on interactions with the elves to avoid unnecessary friction.

As for the beastmen, the nobility of Salma Kingdom didn’t want to upset their relationship with the Hiruku Theocracy, which was why it was illegal to own beastmen slaves, just like it had been in Nozan Kingdom. Most nobles left beastmen alone in the forest and mountains they resided in.

In other words, Margrave Branier wouldn’t be burdened by the conditions in the slightest.

However, Ariane suggested another seemingly impossible condition.

“..... If the council of elders decided to destroy the Hiruku Theocracy, would you accept it?”

“Hah!”

“That.”

The King and the Margrave were taken aback by her final condition.

“The Pope of the Hiruku Religion is the mastermind behind all of this, right? There shouldn’t be any reason to hesitate on the matter, right?”

It was the Knight Arc who stepped in to help the two dumbfounded, relatively powerful humans with their conversation with Ariane.

“Ariane-dono, the Hiruke religion is widely practiced among humans. Wouldn’t a reckless invasion just expand the rift between elves and humans? If leaders like Asparuf-dono and Branier use their power to oppress the faith of the people, it would only cause sects to spring up all over the place.”

Both men looked towards Arc and nodded their heads repeatedly.

The beastmen girl, that had been silent till now, voiced a compromise.

“Then opposing them under the pretext of removing the current pope and cardinals, on the grounds of them having distorted the doctrine concerning different races for their own benefits, should be fine. Either way, it’s impossible to overlook the current Hiruku doctrine.

The King and Margrave could only groan at what she said.

As she said, from this point forward, it would be difficult to maintain a border with the supposedly docile Hiruku Theocracy after they invaded their neighbors with an undead army.

The current Pope’s removal was fundamental in finding a basic solution.

“If you can weaken the power of the Hiruku religion, it should greatly increase the chance of gaining the elders’ support. We can’t promise anything if there aren’t any benefits.”

Ariane had just promised the two that the final condition could be negotiated on.

“So, should we return to the Rouen Forest and talk about this with Dylan-dono?”

“Well, my grandpa..... my grandfather is one of the great elders, this is something that should be taken up by the council.”

While Arc the Knight and Ariane the warrior discussed plans together, an uneasiness sprung up within the Margrave and caused him to unintentionally interrupt them.

“Sorry to interrupt, but it will take four days to reach Rouen from here. In addition, Ariane-dono mentioned bringing this story to Canada a little while ago, correct? Canada is west of Rhoden Kingdom, so my territory would be a battlefield before you make it there and return.”

The Margrave had voiced a reasonable concern, the trek to the Great Canada

Forest was normally a long one, and assuming they managed to amass a formidable fighting force, by the time they returned, Nozan Kingdom might not even be left standing.

However, the Knight Arc simply said: “There’s no need to worry.”.

The Margrave became irritated by his answer, but King Asparuf took over the conversation.

“Arc-dono, can you use the ‘Spiritual Path’?”

The Margrave was shocked by the question before he started looking between the two.

The “Spiritual Path” was a human legend that said elves possessed a secret ability that allowed them to instantly travel across large distances.

Still, the Margrave knew it was simply a legend.

If they really possessed such an ability, then the elves who had been caught and enslaved by humans would have easily escaped.

However, Knight Arc cast a confused look towards Warrior Ariane beside him.

Seeming to judge that using the name humans imposed upon the ability was too presumptuous, the King recount the moment Arc used the “Spiritual Path”.

“It’s the power Arc-dono used to defend me when Cardinal Palermo transformed into a monster and attacked me. Did you not use the ‘Spiritual Path’ to instantly move in front of me?”

Arc finally spoke up when he realized what it was the King had been talking about.

“Oh, transfer magic?”

The King gulped in response to Arc’s response.

“W-With this transfer magic are you capable of instantly traveling anywhere?”

The Margrave managed to hold down his impulse to speak and carefully listened to Arc's answer to the question.

"It isn't that convenient of an ability, but reaching Rouen shouldn't be an issue. Ariane-dono, how long will it take to raise our case with the council of elders and return here with their reply?"

The shocked King and Margrave remained expressionless as Arc asked Ariane about the duration of their upcoming trip.

"I don't think everything will go smoothly in this case. So, I imagine three days at least."

Ariane shook her head and shrugged as she answered Arc's question.

"There's no much time left then, we should get going....."

Arc rose from his chair and bowed to the King and the Margrave before leaving the room with Ariane and Chiome in tow.

Silence took over the room as their backs disappeared in the distance.

"Can the relationship between humans and other races ever be the same?"

The Margrave had muttered that question to himself.

However, King Asparuf and the royal guard Zahar nodded their heads in agreement with what the Margrave was implying.

Chapter 13: Return to Doranto

I had been invited to join the talk between Margrave Branier and King Aspuraf, two individuals who had fought each other for decades.....

Anyone who was informed of such a thing would have been nervous or paralyzed by the prospects of such a situation.

However, I wasn't in a position to refuse the invitation.

Together with Ariane and Chiome, I was in the middle of transporting the migrants recruited amongst the recently freed beastmen slaves of Soulia to the new village.

After the number of immigrants had been determined, Chiome and I had returned to the hidden village and reported the turn of events to the current Hanzo of the Blade Heart Clan, came back here and began moving the candidates to the village being constructed.

It'd been a busy last couple of days moving the capable recruits to various locations via Transfer Gate.

Initially, I'd been doubtful of the reason behind the summons, but I was completely caught off-guard by Margrave Branier's story.

Yet another undead army had attacked the capital of the Salma Kingdom.

Although it had been a rough estimate, Margrave Branier had come seeking a truce with King Asparuf in order to combat the two hundred thousand strong undead army.

Ariane hadn't been pleased when they asked for our assistance, as we had already fulfilled Lille's request to save Nozan Kingdom. That could have been written off as a personal request, but she had judged that a direct request from a human nation needed to be decided upon by the great elders.

Though I felt that she hadn't allowed me much choice in the matter, as a

person who had accepted the name Raratoia I'd say she made the right decision.

However, if I pulled back here all of the time and effort I put into stopping Lille's tears would go to waste.

According to the Margrave, the location of Salma Kingdom's capital city meant that his territory would be the next target of the undead horde once the city fell.

In other words, Nozan had a bit of a reprieve until the two hundred-thousand undead descend up it.

In the worst case scenario, the devastation of Branier's territory would only buy a brief period of time before Nozan shared the same faith, and the humans who had emancipated the non-human slaves and agreed to illegalize slavery would be wiped out.

That wasn't all. If the Branier territory fell to the two hundred-thousand undead, then the elven village that touched upon the territory's border, Doranto, would be in peril.

That village's warriors had already engaged the undead' scouts and the damages they'd suffered had been the reason the village had sought aid. Currently, a group of Canadian warriors and Ariane's father, Dylan, were stationed in Doranto at the grand elders' behest.

If such a situation came to pass, we needed to speak with Doranto's elders and Dylan to start working on countermeasures.

In order to avoid certain problems, it was necessary to bring Ariane with me to Rouen Forest.

"Apologies, Chiome-dono. One of us has to stay in the capital."

Once we had reached one of the palace rooms King Aspura had provided for our stay, I bowed my head and apologized to Chiome.

"Kyun?"

Ariana caught Ponta by the scruff her neck as the little fox gave me a confused

look, while she offered her own apology.

“I’m sorry. Chiome-chan, if we take you to Doranto it’d be uncomfortable for you in a variety of ways, and I rather not expose you to the elves’ disgrace once more..... it’s hard to believe that they’re elves at all.”

Ariane’s brows knitted as she let out a sigh after saying her piece.

The bad impression she got from our first trip to Doranto seems to have struck closer to home since the elves had been responsible for it.

“No, I don’t mind, Ariane-dono. This is an emergency that can’t afford to be bogged down by unnecessary conflict. Please give my regards to Dylan-dono.”

Chiome’s ears twitched atop her head as she waved away the situation.

I nodded in agreement with what she said.

“Alright. There are a lot of things to do so let’s go to Rouen for the sake of expediency.”

Ponta took her usual position atop my helmet while Ariane and I checked our equipment and baggage, assuring our preparations were complete.

Nothing was wrong on Ariane’s and Ponta’s part..... so I took out a makeshift booklet and began flipping through the pages.

The majority of the pages were filled with drawing of various locations that I had visited in this world.

My long-distance transfer magic was capable of taking me to any location I’d been to before, but its usefulness weakened the more one’s memory faded. I’d made these drawings to compensate for that shortcoming.

I recalled the memory of a specific scenery as I found the image I’d been looking for.

“We’re off, Chiome-dono. Transfer Gate.”

I said my goodbyes to Chiome and invoked the magic.

The magic formation sprung up with me at its center and spread to Ariane's feet before the world around us vanished into a black abyss and weightlessness overcame my body.

In the next instant, we stood in the middle of a lush forest instead of the luxurious palace room we had been in.

The location I had drawn opened up in front of us.

Innumerable branches stretched above three huge trees that sit on a gentle hilltop.

While the spiral staircase built into the trunks diminished their majesty in comparison to Dragon King's Tree, they far exceeded the height of regular trees.

Even from here I could make out the various rooftops below the trees' roots that made the fantasy-like town.

.....There was no doubt that this was Doranto, the elven village of Rouen Forest.

"We need to get in contact with my father....."

After a brief glance in my direction, Ariane looked away and went silent.

"We said all of that to Chiome-dono, but this won't be all that different for us, will it?"

A small chuckle left my lips as she sighed at my question.

"No use crying about it now, let's go, Arc."

"Kyun! Kyun!"

Atop my head, Ponta let out a cheerful bark and started wiggling her fluffy tail, almost as if she was attempting to cheer Ariane up.

The two of us began making our way towards Doranto, but the three huge trees distorted my sense of distance and it felt as if we weren't making any progress.

However, the view of the village gradually cleared when I looked in its direction.

A stone and wooden wall surrounded the town, the robustness of which made me certain that common monsters would be incapable of breaking it.

The number of small fields scattered about the outside of the wall was more in line with rural human village farms than those of Canada.

We advanced for a while until we finally reached Doranto's entrance. The two gatekeepers stationed there glared in our direction when they noticed our approach.

The two elves crossed their spears and shouted at us when we finally reached the main gate.

"This is Doranto Village, outsiders and other races are forbidden from entering!"

One of the men gestured for us to leave while the other one nodded along with his partner's statement.

Annoyed by their attitude, Ariane responded with a glare of her own.

"I am the daughter of Dylan Targ, leader of the party dispatched from Canada. Will you allow me to speak with my father? Time is of the essence."

Ariane's voice was laced with a quiet anger, but the pair didn't seem to notice it and stubbornly denied our entrance.

"No, If there is a message, I'll deliver it while you stay out here. Speak your business."

Those who had come in the village's time of need..... even though she was the daughter of another village's elder, they blocked her path because she was of a different race. They weren't all that flexible, but their actions could be interpreted as some kind of courage.

If it had been me, I'd have let her pass as quickly as possible.

“A threat to this village’s continued existence is fast approaching. Do you people understand? The monsters that critically wounded your warriors..... a horde of them could be on the way as we speak. Convey that to my Father!”

Her white hair seemed to be distorted by intense heat, but Ariane somehow managed to suppress her anger and convey a message to Dylan.

However, after hearing the message the pair shared a look before they grabbed their stomachs and started laughing as if they’d been told a hilarious story.

“Hahaha! There’s something wrong with this little lady, right? A threat capable of destroying the village, are you talking about those undead that caught a patrol off-guard?”

As if in sync with one another, one would scrutinize us while the other laughed.

“The warriors who engaged the undead were young and inexperienced. They’d been chasing another monster and took an unnecessary risk pursuing the undead. Experienced warriors like us would never make such a mistake. The relief efforts of the other villages have been exaggerated.”

Ariane was left dumbstruck by the man’s remark.

“Are you serious? You’re speaking about warriors from the same village, right?”

One of the men snorted when he saw Ariane’s expression.

“Hmm! I heard from those who defeated the undead that it wasn’t anything special. There was nothing left but a few dozen damaged sets of armor the humanoid undead had worn!”

All of the emotion drained from Ariane’s face and she tried to walk by the pair as if they weren’t even there.

However, her path was immediately blocked.

“Hey, ignoring us and trying to enter the village. Do you think we’d permit that?”

The gatekeeper's tone had a bit of anger in it when he talked down to Ariane, but from my point of view, the two of them were too high off their own superiority to notice they were treading in a minefield.

The air around us changed and I swore I heard auditable hallucinations of something snapping.

A wall of flames sprung up out of nowhere and encircled Ariane and the two gatekeepers.

She'd reached her boiling point and now magma was starting to spew from the ground.

"!? Are you insane!? Why are you evoking such spirit magic so close to the village!?"

While one of the men accused Ariane of being crazy, I personally felt that they were the crazy ones here.

"Kyun."

Atop my head, Ponta belted out a disgruntled cry before curling up into a ball to avoid getting hurt.

Cha —I command thee, almighty wind.....

A wind current began to swell in-between one of the gatekeeper's hands after he clicked his tongue at Ariane and began chanting. However.....

—Scatter!!—

With a single word, a giant fireball appeared at Ariane's side and launched itself towards the ground in front of him, the resulting explosion echoed throughout the village and canceled out the current.

The two were left dumbstruck when they realized that the wind between the man's hands had dissipated

However, she saw no reason to stop there and unleashed another spell against them.

—Biding earth, by my will, fulfill my goal—

Instead of her usual song-like chants, her voice took on an indignant tone as whip-like earthen tendrils sprung from the ground and shot towards the two gatekeepers in accordance with her will.

The two guards tried to defend themselves with their spears but the tendrils knocked them aside before entangling the pair.

“You said you were experienced, didn’t you? Two hundred years? Or is it three hundred years? I’m not even a hundred years old yet, and I’m still wondering when I can get serious?”

Ariane lips twisted into a sneer as she spoke to the two men in a delighted manner, but contrary her voice, the tendrils ensnaring the two tightened further. They were statues being consumed by stone pillars.

“Gyaaaaa!! My leg, my leg is broken!!”

“Damn it, damn it!!”

Even though the previous explosion had attracted many elves to the village gate, none of them moved as they watched tears stream down the pairs face.

However, a single elven man divided the crowded as he stepped forward.

“Enough, Ariane! Release them immediately!”



Chapter 14: Elder Sergei

A green-tinted, blonde elf somewhere in his mid-twenties to early-thirties, dressed in robes befitting of a Shinto priest, was making his way towards us with an indescribable expression on his face.

I knew who he was..... Ariane's father, Dylan had appeared.

Ariane, who'd just been tightening her vice on the two gatekeepers, shrunk back like a misbehaving child when she saw her father.



“What’s going on here? Why are you causing such an uproar in another village?”

Though Dylan had let out a sigh, the quiet anger that in his voice was clearly transferred to any listener.

I tried to offer Ariane a lifesaver, but just as I was about to speak up, someone else called out to Dylan.

“Please wait! She is not the only one in the wrong!”

A slightly clean-cut and fearless elven warrior ran into the danger zone..... he seemed to be an important person.

The worn leather armor, short hair, stubbly beard and the sword at his hip went against the image of elves I had in my head.

Dylan looked towards him before his eyes returned to Ariane.

“She came to deliver an important message, yet those two laughed it off after listening to it! While I can not agree with her show of force, as a member of the same village, I find their behavior shameful.”

Those that had gathered in the area nodded in agreement with the man’s appeal.

Ariane had to blink a few time to clear the surprised twinkle from her eyes.

I wasn’t all that skilled in distinguishing an elf’s age, but the stubby-bearded warrior and the other villagers looked relatively younger than the gatekeeper duo.

I’d heard Doranto village was an isolated place with a strong dislike for other races, and while that might be true..... it seemed that not everyone thought the same way.

“For now I’ll believe what he said, but why have you returned to this village?”

The tension drained from the area after Dylan cleared his throat and asked Ariane about our intentions.

So she told him about the giant army that was overwhelming Salma Kingdom and was primed to invade Nozan and this very village.

After she'd finished her tale, Dylan remained silent for a while before casting a glance over the surrounding people.

Ariane hadn't exactly been shouting when she explained everything, but elves had good hearing.

Among the crowd that formed the circle around us, some people clearly couldn't believe what they heard.

It couldn't be helped. Unless you had actually been there to see the capital's walls surrounded by a hundred-thousand undead, the sheer scale of it all would seem like an exaggeration.

Dylan looked towards Ariane once more before he directed his gaze towards me, who'd been sidelined ever since the bearded man handled the incident with the gatekeepers.

"This could have been a major issue if we hadn't had time to prepare countermeasures. Ariane, Arc-kun, come with me. I need you to speak with my elder acquaintance..... hopefully, he can call a meeting to order."

After saying that, Dylan turned around and headed back into the village.

Ariane and I stood there frozen for a moment before following after him.

We headed towards a house slightly larger than those around it on the outskirts of the village.

An elven man who looked to be in his thirties greeted Dylan at the house's door.

Supple muscles filled out a simple set of clothing and he had slightly masculine features, but his left ear was only half the length of his right ear.

He looked like a veteran soldier with a long military record.

Dylan introduced the man as Sergei Ful Doranto.

After inviting us into his home and leading us to a spacious living room, a long conversation began after we took a seat.

Ponta chose a spot near a window and wagged her tail as she watched the scenery outside.

Doranto seemed to have three elders, and this was one of them.

Apparently, since he was an acquaintance with Dylan, Raratoria's elder, Sergei had asked for him to be appointed Canada's representative when the request for aid had been sent.

"There are a lot of bigots in my village, and they won't pass up the opportunity to cause trouble."

Seeing Sergei laugh at him, Dylan remembered what Glenys had looked like when he had told her about the decision to come here and lamented, saying, "My wife got in a bad mood because of that."

However, the reprieve was short-lived and the conversation returned to the matter at hand.

"Well, that's good. Dealing with the future should be our top priority."

Sergei nodded along with Dylan's statement.

"Certainly. I'll gather the other elders so we can conduct an emergency meeting. You two will have to attend as well, but please avoid making another outburst like the one at the gate."

Ariane tried to defend herself, but Sergei just said "Stay here for a while" before he let out a sigh and left.

Dylan watched as Sergei left the living room before sitting up straight and turning a serious look on Ariane.

"Before he returns, tell me about what's going on in as much detail as possible. There aren't many avenues for this village to take. They can abandon this place and immigrate to Canada, or seek reinforcements from us and fight."

Although he had been making an angry expression a moment ago, a smile returned to his face when Dylan raised his head.

“The best option would be to unite with the humans. In fact, the beastmen in Rhoden and Rinburuto..... a discussion has already begun to prohibit the wrongful enslavement of the People of the Planes and Mountains”

Though Ariane and I were surprised by Dylan’s statement, we asked him to verify what he said.

“Is that true?”

“Hou, that’s quite the coincidence.”

“That’s so. I never imagined that a human country would be placed in a situation where they’d be forced to accept that condition.....”

I lowered my head at Dylan’s wry smile.

“No, the situation has accelerated beyond expectations. Once things are settled here, I’ll take this to the council of elders in Canada. Originally, our efforts were an attempt stem the tide of the homogeneous exclusion on this continent by supporting the human countries that were willing to accept other races.

Speaking of which, Dylan had been staying in Rhoden Kingdom until recently to take care of various things, but I never expected him to be working on such a project.

I unintentionally nodded my head repeatedly as I thought of a potential future, Ariane gave me a strange look in response to my behavior.

“What are you smirking for.....”

I tried to touch my face when she said that, but I only felt the usual cold metal of my helmet. How could she know what kind of expression I had?

“Arc, it’s easy to read most of your emotions. So, what were you thinking about?”

I could only shrug my shoulders in defeat as she proudly boasted about being

able to read me.

“It wasn’t anything major? I was simply imagining a city where humans, beastmen, and elves could live together. It’s a nice dream to have.”

The fantasy world I had imagined.

A world in which the various races used their various strengths to live, it would be a fun story if such a future came to pass..... it was a simple dream.

Ariane and Dylan shared a look with one another when they heard what I said and smiled.

“It certainly is a nice dream. It won’t be possible immediately, but the conditions Arc-kun imposed on that country are a good first step.”

Dylan followed his words with a gentle smile while Ariane let out a small sigh.

“In that case Nozan Kingdom and the Branier territory need to be there in the future.”

“Yeah, but first we need to persuade Doranto, right?”

After agreeing with Ariane, I returned to the topic of the upcoming meeting.

Dylan seemed optimistic when he answered my question.

“Though it might be a little difficult, Sergei and his supporters should be a great help. Rhoden and the Branier territory will be the same, but now is the time for change.”

After saying that Dylan looked at Ponta’s sleeping face as she basked in the sunlight from the window.

Chapter 15: Doranto Meeting

After Sergei returned, he immediately briefed everyone on where the meeting would occur and what we should expect.

Once done, all of us rose and left Sergei's house.

Sergei walked ahead as we made our way through Doranto, and while various pairs of eyes were directed towards us, Sergei and Dylan paid them no heed and walked towards the center of the village.

As we neared the center of the village, a building larger than those surrounding it came into view.

The building was cylindrical in shape, and once we entered the building under Sergei's guidance, its interior was revealed to be wooden. It was completely different from any other building I'd seen so far.

The high ceiling and lack of sectioning walls should have prevented the oppressive atmosphere, but the sheer number of people crowded in the area made the building seem incredibly fragile.

However, when people saw Sergei they parted ways and allowed him to continue towards his destination.

Once we reached the center of the room, we saw a large, circular table and two people who were already seated in two of the three available chairs.

These three chairs had been set up for the three village elders.

The elves of Doranto had gathered here to watch the meeting that was about to happen.

I had assumed that only the elders would be in attendance and was caught off guard by all the villagers gathered here. However, before Sergei could take his seat one of the sitting men started speaking.

"For what reason have you called this impromptu meeting, and why have you involved the villagers? Moreover, why are outsiders where they don't belong?!"

The man that spoke was completely different from my expectation of what an elf should be.

I couldn't tell for sure since he was sitting down, but he seemed to be rather short.

He had the long ears universal among his kind, but the old man, who seemed to be in his late forties by human standards, lacked any green-tinted blonde hair.

Dylan had informed me that the man's name was Roato Bruni Doranto.

The little man, something Roato was taunted for behind his back, wasted no time with formalities and went straight to the point of the meeting.

In contrast to his aggressive behavior, the other elder calmly took a sip from his cup of tea.

Unlike Roato, the other man was very tall. His white-ish, curly hair reached down his back, the beard and mustache combined with his forelocks made it difficult to read his expression.

His appearance, combined with the gnarled wooden cane at his side, gave the man a hermit-like aura.

He was the oldest of the elders, Iwaldo Weyli Doranto

The majority of the people at his back were women, with the few men there being pushed to the very back.

Men didn't seem to be fans of Elder Iwaldo.

The final elder, Sergei Ful Doranto, took his seat

Men with relatively young features and well-toned bodies sat at his back.

Dylan stood before them, while Ariane and I stood next to him, with Ponta on the top of my head.

Somehow or other, the people had organized themselves behind the elder they supported.

Given the glares that Roato and his ilk were sending in our direction, I imagine they were composed of the more xenophobic members of the village.

No matter how old an elf got, their outward appearance didn't change much.

However, there was still a range of appearances.

The equivalent to a human's late-teens to early-forties made up the rough estimate of the elves' generational divides.

Based on that assumption, Roato's followers were composed of those that looked to be in their thirties and forties. On the other hand, Sergei's follower consisted of teenagers and twenty-year-olds, and while they were not equaling the thirty-year-olds in numbers, they weren't a small group by any means.

There was more age variety among Iwaldo's follower, but it would be better to say that they seemed to represent the female populace in general.

Well, there weren't any heated gazes from Sergei's supporters, if anything they looked at us with curiosity.

Curiosity was to be expected from the relatively young.

Many of Roato's supporter were part of the elven "old guard". Given that an elf's average lifespan was four hundred years, they must have been over three hundred.

It seems that even elven elderly were resistant to change and actively fought new movements.

..... Well, let's see how the first stages of the meeting play out.

While I observed the chaotic meeting area, Sergei was the first to speak up.

"Silence! We will begin the meeting to decide this village's future! First, you will be informed of the current circumstances by our compatriots from Canada!"

Without any greeting or introduction, Dylan stepped forward and began speaking once Sergei brought order to the room.

Roato was openly irritated by Dylan, but Sergei's fearless smile kept him in check as Dylan recited the story to the attentive crowd.

".....And that is, more or less, the crisis Doranto faces. If countermeasures aren't taken immediately, sooner or later this village might be wiped off the map."

When Dylan had completed the short account of what was going on, the meeting hall had fallen completely silent.

"Two-hundred-thousand undead, what utter nonsense! For what reason do you claim that such a force is headed towards Rouen!?"

Roato was the first one to speak up in the silent room.

His supporters shouted their support of his statement, but Sergei's followers rebutted them.

"The warriors who fought the monsters suffered heavy casualties! Even if only ten thousand of these monster attack, this village is done for! Assuming it to be a lie from the start, how are you planning to take responsibility if the attack is real!"

One after another, people voiced their agreement and joined the heated argument.

However, their opposition didn't simply sit there and take it.

"Joining forces with the humans is impossible! If the monsters seek to destroy the humans, let them! Once the land is less crowded we can build more villages!"

"Fool! Do you not realize just how many humans there are!? If Salma and Nozan are destroyed, a more powerful nation will move in to conquer the region!"

"While the circumstances of the humans are dire, it isn't our duty to protect them! They ask too much of us in exchange for a simple promise! Lending them our power, ridiculous!"

“Thinking like that will only cause the chasm between the races to widen instead of filling it! Increasing our number of allies, even a little, will be beneficial for our future!”

“Let the humans fight, we can destroy the wounded enemy afterward! There’s no need to join their struggle!”

“Even if two-hundred-thousand end up becoming a hundred-and-fifty-thousand, it would make no difference for the village! While the young will be out there, fighting the enemy, the old men will be trembling in their homes! This whole mess is because of the old leadership!”

“What did you say, you little brat!!”

Instead of a discussion about joining the humans or not, this place had dissolved into a bickering contest.

Elves were stereotypically depicted as a wise race, but when I looked at the elves here, there wasn’t anything differentiating them from humans.

As the tension continued to rise, the person who hadn’t said anything so far made his move.

Elder Iwaldo had decided to act.

He grasped his wooden cane and violently slammed it against the ground.

Before the cane managed to hit the ground, a small orb appeared on its tip and in the next moment, the meeting hall was enveloped by a blinding light.

“Wha-, what’s that!?” “Ugh!?” “Kya!”

Ariane and I blocked the light with our hands and mantle respectively, while Ponta covered her face with her tail. However, many of the other people groaned or shouted as the light caught them off guard.

When the light finally faded, people were left rubbing their eyes and groaning.

Once the curses ended calmness returned to the meeting hall.

“Tch! Why did you do that in the middle of the meeting!?”

Roato glared at Iwaldo through strained eyes and cursed at him, but the older elder ignored him and finally opened his mouth.

“If you would like to fight with the humans and join hands with them in the future, you’re welcome to move to Canada. Canada will choose to fight with the humans no matter what becomes of Doranto.....”

The hall fell silent as Iwaldo’s statement echoed through the room.

Roato was the first to react.

“Hahaha! That’s right! If you really want to help the humans go join Canada and their ilk!”

Roato’s body began to shake as he fully opened his eyes again and began to laugh again.

As noise began to pick up again after his statement, Iwaldo struck the ground with his cane again.

Everyone took the gesture as a sign to settle down, while Iwaldo had a mischievous grin on his face as he lightly chuckled.

“So what I’m saying is that, above all else, it’s my responsibility to leave the village.”

There were quite a few people incapable of grasping the meaning behind Iwaldo words, he just chuckled again before the eyes buried under his hair were looking at Sergei.

“What would you do? I for one rather like the syrup of Canada’s capital Maple. Will you keep me company and enjoy sweets with one another?”

Sergei directed a fearless smile towards Iwaldo and they shared a laugh.

“Hahaha, sure! Sometimes it’s nice to keep the company of old times!”

Hearing Sergei’s declaration, his young supporters were all showing their

approval, with one after another announcing their intention to migrate to Canada.

Confronted with such an inspired display, Iwaldo's mostly female supporters were taken aback by his proposal.

Sergei's supporters were the young people, who also made up a large part of the village's soldiers. Their lovers, sweethearts, mothers and other loved ones soon joined their declarations of leaving the village and moving to Canada.

Even some of the fathers and husbands in Roato's faction began to join the declaration of migration.

Roato and his older supporters were the only ones upset by this turn of events.

"Wait, wait! Can such selfishness be allowed in this situation?! It's short-sighted, too short-sighted! Think of the time it will take them to get to Canada, request support, assemble them, and return here! Isn't the better solution to hide and wait for things to settle!?"

Some of the people seemed to have been persuaded by Roato's interjection and looked towards Sergei and Iwaldo for answers.

The smile on Iwaldo's face never faltered, even under everyone's gaze, as he turned an inquisitive look onto Dylan.

In turn, Dylan turned his head in my direction.

Naturally, the eyes of the people that surround me, even Ariane's, were focused on me.

What Dylan was asking was as clear as day.

In that moment, I gave Dylan the thumbs up.

A smile made its way across Dylan's lips when he saw the gesture, then he went on to ease the two elders' worries.

"It's alright, there's no problem."

Iwaldo's smile spread across his face before he nodded towards Dylan.

“There’s no problem.”

When Sergei began to laugh, his supporters stood up in unison, as if they had been waiting for it.

“Begin evacuation preparations immediately! Detailed instructions will be given later!”

With that one order, the people that had gathered in the meeting hall began to clear out one after another, until only Roato and his followers remained.

Ariane, Dylan, and I returned to Sergei’s house.

On the way back Ariane said “That was refreshing.” with a satisfied expression on her face, as she stretched her arms above her head.

Ponta imitated Ariane a top my helmet.

..... the first problem with Doranto had been taken care of for now.

Once we were inside Sergei’s house, we began discussing our future plans with Dylan.

“The central forces of Maple needs to be gathered as quickly as possible, otherwise this village and the nation will not survive.”

Ariane and I nodded when Dylan looked us in the eye and voiced his opinion.

“While Arc-kun’s magic will save us a considerable amount of time, there’s still much that needs to be done. Did you hear how long it’d take the two-hundred-thousand undead to reach the territory of the human alliance?”

Shaking my head almost caused Ponta to fall off my head, and Ariane shrugged and shook her head as well.

“Then, we’ll ask King Asuparf and Margrave Branier when we go to pick up Chiome-dono. They should also be concerned about what progress has been made.”

Dylan seemed to agree with my suggestion.

“Alright. I would like to form a connection with Nozan’s King as well. May I accompany you? I would like to experience the legendary transfer magic for myself.”

While Dylan laughed off his light comment Sergei, who’d been listening up till now, was taken aback by our conversation.

I simply gave him a thumbs up.

Sergei was lost in the clouds after hearing Dylan’s plans but he roughly patted my back once he came out of it.

“I see, I see! Hope surely has sprung up! Hahaha.”

I couldn’t see his face because Ponta slipped over my eyes because of the constant patting, but I was happy that my power could be of use to someone.

“Then we should get going. We should return in a day or so. Transfer Gate!”

After a brief farewell, I evoked my long distance transfer magic.

Chapter 16: Princess Lille's Determination

Our surroundings faded away and after a moment of weightlessness, the remains of the Kingdom's destroyed southern gate replaced the house we'd just been in.

The sun seemed to touch the peaks of the mountain in the west and the sky reflected the colors of autumn.

"Oh, is this..... the capital that you mentioned? Quite an enthusiastic display....."

Dylan's admirations of my transfer magic were cut short when he noticed the scorched earth and innumerable sets of wrecked armor scattered along the outskirts of the gate.

The scars of my use of Blazing Seraphim of Judgement: Executioner Michael clearly remained on this stretch of earth.

However, the shadows of multiple people could be seen moving through the burnt field.

A closer look revealed the shadows to be humans and beastmen sifting through the wreckage of armor and weapons, placing their finding into baskets stripped to their backs.

They would probably be melted down and forged into new tools.

Repairmen could be seen working on the wall that surrounds the southern gate, with stone and wooden barricades acting as a temporary defense until the gaps could be filled in.

They had begun to gradually rebuild the city.

"Hmm, quite resilient to say the least."

"Yeah."

Ariane chimed in on the on my brief remark.

“Well, why don’t you go and look for Chiome-kun while I speak with the king?”

Once Dylan was done taking in the scenery, he put his hands on his waist and looked towards Soulia.

Ariane and I nodded at his suggestion and began heading towards the southern gate.

Several people in the vicinity of the gate were well aware of who we were and permitted us to enter with relative ease. Asparuf was probably the one who arranged things this way.

Additionally, Chiome seems to have been leading her strength to the soldiers and guards hunting the remnants of the undead in the city, and several people asked us to thank her on their behalf.

” I can’t help but feel a little anxious when we left, but everything seems alright.”

Ariane heaved a relieved sigh when she heard of Chiome’s achievements.

A sinister smile appeared on Dylan’s face when he heard Ariane’s words.

“She is very mature after all, and wouldn’t attack the gatekeepers like a certain someone did.”

Ariane’s shoulders started to tremble and she averted her gaze in response to Dylan’s pointed comment.

For the time being, there were at least two people I should avoid making angry.

As such thoughts occupied my mind we eventually came across a girl dressed in black.

The black cat ears, her long, black tail, and the way she walked without making a sound undoubted marked her as Chiome.

When Chiome saw Dylan accompanying us, she offered him a slight bow.

“Chiome-chan, what are you doing in this place?”

Chiome’s ears did a little pitter-patter when Ariane asked what she’d been up to, before partially drawing her dagger from its waist sheath.

“I’ve been hunting the remnants of the undead in the city. Because our noses are better, my liberated brethren capable of fighting and I have joined the clean-up campaign.”

Her nose twitched a little when she said that, but a bit of dust must have flew up her nostril because she immediately let out a small sneeze.

“Ariane-dono, Arc-dono have you finished what you needed to take care of?”

After she recovered, Chiome directed a question towards us, but Ariane and I shared a mutual look in this delicate environment.

“It didn’t go as well as we would have liked, but I think things are heading in a good direction.”

“I see, so what’s our next move?”

Chiome slightly tilted her head and changed the topic to our plans moving forward.

Dylan was the one that answered her question.

“First, I’ll have a meeting with the King of this country, where we can share a bit of information with one another.”

“Is that so, then we’d better hurry.”

At Chiome’s urging our group quickly made our way toward the palace in the center of the city.

“Oh, a few of the soldiers wanted to thank you for your help, Chiome. It seems you’ve been rather active in the undead hunt.”

When I passed along the message the soldiers asked me to Chiome her blue eyes sparkled for before she simply said: “I see.....”.

The strokes of her tail wags became wilder.

Eventually, we passed through the palace gate without issue and, after telling a nearby guard we sought an audience with the King, were guided to a backroom inside the palace.

King Asparuf and Margrave Branier were already seated by the time we entered the room, their expression betraying the restlessness they experienced waiting for our answer.

Asparuf, who'd admitted to never having seen an elf beside Ariane and me, acknowledged Dylan with a nod.

"And you are?"

"I am Dylan Targ Raratoia, acting elder of Raratoia of the Great Canada Forest. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Dylan slowly lowered his head as he answered the King's question.

Asparuf and Branier nearly fell on their faces because of Dylan self-introduction.

Given that he'd introduced himself as an elder of Canada, they must have assumed that reinforcements would be sent immediately.

However, Dylan realized that and shook his head as he cleared up their confusion.

"I'm sorry, but I am merely acting as a representative of Rouen forest on this occasion, not the capital's reinforcements you asked the three of them for."

The two powerful men righted themselves in their seats upon hearing Dylan's statement.

With a smile on his face, he offered the two men a bit of hope.

"However, the capital wouldn't remain indifferent to the plight of Rouen Forest. The majority of Doranto has decided to join forces with humans to combat the common enemy."

Asparuf and Branier eyes bulged while Dylan calmly looked down at them.

The room remained silent until someone cleared their throat.

“I intend to return to Canada and gather the necessary fighting force to combat the threat at hand.”

The two human rulers looked overjoyed when Dylan said that.

“Oh, I see. All hope is not lost.....”

Asparuf’s true feelings leaked out without an ounce of hesitation.

I didn’t notice it immediately, but there was a somewhat listless expression on the King’s face, and Margrave Branier looked towards the King with a grievous expression.

What happened?

While I mulled over my thoughts, a guard came running into the room.

As it was a state of emergency, one was always open for reports.

However, when Asparuf saw the guard he donned a bitter expression and urged him to give his report, who proceed to do so as quickly as possible.

“Yes, pardon me! A ‘bird’ has arrived from those who had been sent to the Delfuento Kingdom! The capital, Sarets, is soon to fall. The enemy is innumerable. That was the message!”

Everyone was taken back by the message the guard read aloud.

If I wasn’t mistaken, Delfuento Kingdom was just north of Nozan.

I’m sure that.....

“Chiome-dono, you said that Goemon-dono and others went to Delfuento to search for clues, right?”

Ariane’s and Dylan’s eyes naturally went to Chiome when I asked that question,

Her expression didn't change in the slightest, but her ears twitched in synchronization with Ponta's.

"I haven't received any information regarding this. I can't say anything because I do not know the location of that country's capital, but if there was an undead army on the same scale as the previous one, than Goemon hasn't encountered it....."

However, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that Nozan was in a problematic situation..... large forces of monsters were attacking the capitals of its neighbors in the north and south and they were primed for a battle on two fronts.

After thanking and dismissing the guard, Asparuf sighed heavily.

Despite Margrave Branier harsh features, the fatigue could clearly be seen on his face.

I imagine the pair would never show these expressions to their subordinates, but it must have been too difficult to given the gravity of the situation.

It was Dylan who started talking, in his usual tone, managing to break the tension in the room.

"This is a little troublesome. I promised to gather forces from Canada, but as you know, there aren't as many elves as there are humans. Focusing on one battlefield is a necessity, how far away is the capital of Salma from Soulia?"

Asparuf raised his head, raised an eyebrow, and groaned in response to Dylan's question.

"I-If I'm not mistaken, it'll be ten days away by horse....."

Dylan nodded his head before asking the same of Delfuento's capital.

"I don't know the exact details, but it should be seven or eight days away."

Once Asparuf gave him the answer Dylan gaze immediately fell up Margrave Branier.

"What's the distance between Salma's capital and your territory?"

“It takes six days to reach the border and seven to reach the heart of my territory.”

Having already grasped Dylan’s intentions, the Margrave answered Dylan without questioning him.

However, when everything was taken into consideration...

“Even if we set up an ambush, the two armies’ invasions are bound to overlap with one another.”

The atmosphere seemed to grow more oppressive as Ariane let out a sigh.

“Did the Hiruku Theocracy attack these three countries simultaneously? Just how many undead do they possess..... assuming they sent the same numbers to Delfuento as they did to Salma, and adding those that were destroyed here, that’s about five hundred-thousand.”

In order to better comprehend the current situation, I spoke the enemy’s potential numbers aloud, but all that seemed to have accomplished was clarifying the harshness of reality.

Both the King’s and the Margrave’s shoulders trembled as their eyes became downcast.

“It’ll be difficult to concentrate our efforts on one front while keeping track of the enemy on the other. There’s also no guarantee that the large undead army will head straight here, it’s possible they may attack another city on the way here. They may desire to bolster their ranks after all...”

The room fell silent again after Dylan muttered his analysis of the current state of affairs.

When the King raised his head he and Dylan finally looked each other in the eye.

His eyes had a question for Dylan, but a sudden thought spurred the King into action.

“A-Ah, our war potential. One of my sons should be returning to the nobles’

private armies. Also..... if we can borrow Arc-dono's power we could seek some reinforcements from Rhoden."

The Rhoden Kingdom did conduct trade with Nozan that was facilitated through the Burugo gulf, but would that be enough of a reason aid a neighboring country?

I could see that the same question had crossed Ariane's mind.

Chiome paid the conversation no mind and directed her ears towards the room's door.

While I would have liked to find out what was going on, but my eyes returned to Asparuf when he started talking again.

"Rhoden's King was married to my little sister, Melissa. Melissa has already passed on, but my niece, Princess Julianna, is still there. Given the circumstances, we have no choice but to take advantage of their kindness."

I simultaneously felt a surprised and like I was forgetting something important when I heard the King's words.

.....What was it?

"Kyun?"

Ponta let out a worried cry as I asked myself that question.

I pushed that issue to the back of my mind for the time being, right now we needed to decide on who the messenger to Rhoden would be.....

Since the royalty of Nozan and Rhoden are related to one another, sending a member of the royal family would be for the best, right?

Dylan had the same thought as I had and lightly suggested the idea to King Asparuf.

"Assuming that we send a messenger to Rhoden, it's only common courtesy for family to converse with each other. I recently negotiated with them, so I should be able to act as a mediator on the messenger's behalf."

Asparuf had a difficult expression on his face as he considered his options before he opened his mouth.

“The only one that can fulfill that role right now is Lille.....”

His tone was heavy as he spoke.

Based on his tone, it was obvious that he was reluctant to make Lille the messenger.

He probably thought a young girl around ten years old wasn't up to the task.

Princess Lille was certainly capable of handling herself, but as her father, he must have thought that she needed to rest after all the heavy burdens she'd taken on ever since she'd been sent to the Domo Earldom.

However, the person the King intended to dismiss vigorously opened the door and strutted in.

“I accept the duty of being the messenger!”

Every pair of eyes fell upon the source of the young girl's voice.

With swollen, red eyes and previously shed tears staining the cuffs of her dress, Princess Lille stood resolutely in front of her father— of King Asparuf.

Since Chiome had stayed in the capital, I turned to her for an explanation of the Princess's disheveled appearance.

However, Chiome slowly shook her head when she noticed my gaze.

That's right, she been running around the new city district ever since we left.

“Lille, I told you to rest some time ago.....”

Rather than as a king, Asparuf addressed the Princess as her father.

But Lille stubbornly shook her head and replied to Asparuf about the matter of the messenger problem.

“For Sevaru's sake! If there is anything I can do, however small it may be,

then I'm ready to set off tomorrow! Brother would be mortified if I did anything less for our country.....”

Tears began to fall like rain after her shout, but she desperately tried to wipe them away with her already wet cuffs.

Her sobbing led another person to enter the room.

The person bowed at the entrance before kneeling in front of Lille and wiping her eyes with a handkerchief, all the while apologizing to King Asparuf for her shortcomings.

“I am terribly sorry. I took my eyes off her for a second and she slip—”

Lille's escort's, Nina, frantically apology was to cut off by the King himself, with a simple “It's fine.”.

“Lille, the messenger needs to reach Rhoden, east of here. Arc-dono already has his own—”

“It should be fine.”

While I sympathized with Asparuf and understood why he'd been about to say what he was, I interrupted him with my own opinion.

All eyes were on me, demanding an answer, but I proudly stuck out my chest and continued.

“I am willing to transport Lille-dono to Rhoden as a messenger. If we manage to obtain reinforcements, I can bring them here immediately.”

“Kyun!”

Ponta poofed out her chest in response to my declaration.

“I-Is that true? Arc-dono.”

Lille and Asparuf seemed to be in a daze as they stared at me.

“We've already come this far, so I'll use the fullest of my abilities to see things through to the end.”

When I raised my arm and made a flexing gesture, Ponta began to wag her tail atop my head.

Princess Lille wiped away her tears and smiled a little as she watched my behavior.

The view of his daughter seems to have helped Asparuf harden his resolve, as he rose from his chair, knelt in front of Lille and brushed a strain of hair out of her eyes.

“Since the day is almost over make your preparations for tomorrow and head to bed early. I’ll prepare a letter to Rhoden later tonight. Tha.....”

His gentle words trailed off and he stopped brushing Lille’s hair as he slowly took out a necklace from his breast pocket.

Asparuf protectively placed the necklace around her neck and smiled a little as he watched Lille wide-eyes stare of amazement.

“Father, this necklace?”

Lille questioned her father about the mysterious necklace she received.

“It is the necklace I gave your aunt Melissa when she married into the Rhoden’s royal family. It’s a bit of a lucky charm.....”

Lille grey eyes twinkled a bit when she heard Asparuf’s answer.

“Thank you, Father.”

“Nina, Lille please.”

The King’s eyes shifted away from his daughter and focused her guardian Nina behind her. She bowed her head before leading Nina out of the room.

“Let’s head back to your room, princess, and prepare for tomorrow.”

As Nina was promoting Lille to leave the room, her feet came to a stop when she caught sight of Chiome.

I expected a fridge atmosphere between the two of them, but that didn’t seem

to be the case.

After debating with herself for a moment Nina slightly bowed her head and offered Chiome an apology for her previous behavior.

“Chiome-dono, please forgive me for my thoughtless remarks the other day. As it would be a hindrance here, I’ll properly apologize to you at a later date.”

Nina bowed her head again and Chiome responded with a curt nod.

“About that..... I don’t really care anymore.”

“.....I see.”

Although Nina was a little discouraged by their exchange, when Chiome turned away from her I caught a glimpse of a small smile and a twitch in her cat ears.

“D-Don’t you have to stay by Lille’s side? At this rate, you’ll be reprimanded again.”

Probably feeling the pair of eyes that remained on the back of her head, Chiome’s tails swayed sinisterly as her statement caused Nina to go “Ugh” and grasp her chest.

“.....I-I’m off then. Thank you, Chiome-dono.”

Once she recovered from her shock, Nina thanked Chiome before she ran after her little master, who’d already left a while ago.

Chiome’s eye lingered on the door as Nina left the room, but she eventually turned back around and let out a small sigh.

At least one hassle has been taken care of before tomorrow’s trip to Rhoden.

Asparuf breathed a sigh of relief after seeing the exchange between Nina and Chiome.

My mind wandered back to Lille’s disheveled appearance.

“Asparuf-dono, why did Lille-dono appear as she did?”

The was a pause in the conversation as the King sunk back into his chair before he was ready to talk about what had happened.

“Around noon, we received a message from a neighboring noble territory. Before Soulia was completely surrounded by the undead army, I dispatched my two sons to gather reinforcements. My youngest son fell in battle, to a monster that had been pursuing him.”

Asparuf had closed his eyes and spoke in a slow methodical manner, as he tried to keep his emotions in check.

That explained Lille’s strange behavior and appearance when she entered the room.

Ariane’s and Chiome’s anxious eyes wandered towards the door the princess had left out of.

Margrave Branier seems to have already heard the story from Asparuf as he calmly remained seated, without any hint of shock or surprise on his face.

Despite the tragedy of losing an older brother, Lille moved forward to protect the country he died for. At her age, I doubted I would have had the will to take on such a task.

In fact, my lack of willpower seemed all the more pronounced when compared to her indomitable spirit.

“Tomorrow, we’ll need to brace ourselves.....”

My words were enough to motivate Ponta, her fluffy tail swelling in response to them.

Ariane directed a strong gaze towards me when she heard my soliloquy.

“Don’t get so fired up that you do unnecessary things.”

I replied to her warning with a small nod.

Somehow, I felt that the weight of the fur ball on my head was decreased.

Chapter 17: Return to Rhoden Kingdom

The next day, in a certain corner of Soulia's palace.

Over a dozen people had gathered in a garden a normal person could never visit.

Lille and her two guardians stood in the center of garden, while eight additional royal guards waited behind them.

Nozan Kingdom's group of messengers to Rhoden consisted of just those eleven people.

Dylan, Ariane, Ponta and myself represented the Elves of Great Canada Forest, so we could be considered three plus one people. Chiome, as a member of the "Blade Heart Clan", represented the beastmen. All together, the delegation to Rhoden Kingdom counted fifteen plus one members.

Since this was to be an official meeting, a horse-drawn carriage and two horses for Nina and Zahar had been prepared in the garden.

Everyone was currently checking their equipment and supplies one final time.

In the corner of the garden, King Asparuf and a few important ministers were watching us and discussing something amongst themselves.

They were probably intellectuals that wished to witness the elven "Path of Spirits" for themselves.

While under the observing looks of those intellectuals, Dylan's eyes remained focus on Lille's carriage as he pondered something.

"Something wrong, Dylan-dono?"

When I asked about his strange behavior, he turned towards me with a troubled expression on his face.

"No, it's just that Princess Lille's carriage is adorned with the emblem of Nozan Kingdom, and I would like to have something that announces our arrival,

as its something we elves currently lack.”

I didn’t know what to make of Dylan’s issue, so I looked to Ariane for answers, but she looked a bit embarrassed as she shook her head.

“We shouldn’t have too much trouble attracting attention thanks to Arc, right?”

Dylan gave Ariane a small shake of the head in response to her question.

“Although his luxurious appearance does catch the eye, it doesn’t do a good job of representing the elves to outsiders. Since Princess Lille’s visit won’t be following the normal diplomatic procedure, I was hoping to make a strong enough impression to smooth over our arrival.”

After his explanation, I was somewhat able to understand his logic.

Since it was well known that the royal families of Rhoden and Nozan were related, it wouldn’t be difficult for people to immediately accept the validity of our mission.

Still, proving our intentions might take several days of interrogations and identification checks if things were handled poorly.

Dylan had recently been negotiating with Rhoden’s government, so if we had an identifier they could immediately verify our identities and intentions.

Certainly, if those in Rhoden had some way of immediately recognizing him, it would help us introduce Lille’s delegation.

In that case.....

While I was wrapped up in my own thoughts, Lille entered her carriage, followed by Dylan..... Seeing that, my eyes narrowed and I started to smile.

Next, I spoke up since I realised something important.

“I totally forgot that Shiden is still in the palace’s stables!”

“Ah” “!”

Ariane and Chiome had a similar reaction when they heard what I said.

Under the guidance of one of the palace guards, I found my way to the stables only to catch sight of a large figure occupying the small grazing field beside it.

“Shiden, I’m sorry I didn’t come pick you up sooner.”

I called out to Shiden as I approached. However, Shiden just swatted his tail and lowered his head towards the ground.

“This child is sulking. Because of Arc forgetfulness.....”

“Arc-dono, to abandon the partner charging into battle with you.....”

Not willing to just stand there, I tried to rebut Ariane and Chiome’s criticism.

“I’ll admit my mistake, but Ariane-dono and Chiome-dono forget about him as well.”

The two of them diverted their eyes when I said that.

However, I still needed to make up with Shiden if I wanted to get him out of the stable.

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Ponta was the first that tried to persuade him.



“.....Hey, Shiden, how about we go to for a run in your home plains next time?”

Its seems like promising a trip back home did the trick.

“Giyuriiiiin!”

Shiden hoofbeats lightened after we’d returned to the palace garden the others had gathered in.

“Dylan-dono, you’re bound to attract everyone’s attention if you ride Shiden ahead of the princess’ carriage, right? There shouldn’t be any issue if I’m the one at the reins.”

“Giyurin.”

While was I stroking Shiden’s muzzle, Dylan looked him over before nodding his head.

“Certainly, an I don’t believe we can hope to find anything better. Since we’re already pressed for time, we should leave immediately, shouldn’t we? Arc-kun, if you would.”

Dylan climbed atop Shiden’s saddle with Ariane sitting down behind him.

Chiome stood next to me and seemed to be set on walking.

After instructing the onlookers to step back, I prepared to invoke my long distance transfer magic.

It felt as if I were returning to Rhoden after a long absence.

Having said that, the Rhoden transfer locations were still depended on my memory and I haven’t drawn all of them in my booklet. It may have been better to take the time to draw a few locations while I had the chance.

After planning a little ahead, I started to draw on my memories from my last trip to Rhoden’s capital Olav.

The landscape I remembered the best was the view of the city I got from the

base of the Calcutta mountain range when we'd been liberating Chiome's enslaved brethren.

“Transfer Gate!”

Because I had to include Lille's carriage, the mounted guards and Shiden, I put more mana into the spell in order to expand the size of the magic circle.

After a moment of darkness, all of the party members gradually became aware of Rhoden's dignified capital in the distance.

Ariane and Chiome took a moment to take in the magnificent view of the capital without any of the turbulence and confusion from that day.

The delegates from Nozan were caught off guard by the sudden change from the palace gardens and were restlessly trying to reorient themselves.

The royal guards were trained to handle unexpected situations, but even they were caught off guard by the literally 'magical phenomenon'.

“Th-This is great! We're in a place I've never been before!”

Lille leaped out of her carriage and took note of the northern mountains in the distance.

Soulia wasn't surrounded by many tall mountains, so she must have been naturally curious about the mountain range.

Shiden quickly came to term with the sudden shift of his surroundings before starting to chomping at the grass near his hooves.

“We don't know exactly how much time remains, so it would be best to go to Olav immediately. Princess Lille, please return to your carriage.”

“Ah, I understand.”

Atop of Shiden, Dylan's voice was rather rough as he called out to the rest of the group.

Following his words, our group redirected itself towards Rhoden's capital in

the south.

Unfortunately, the location I transferred us to was far away from the paved roads entering the city, so it was a bit of a challenge to navigate Lille's carriage through the plains.

If I wasn't mistaken, the road we eventually got on led to Lanbaltic in the west.

As we advanced forward, I remembered the time I made a mistake and we wound up in the wasteland town Buranbeina.

The curious gazes of the other people on the road were directed towards us, and as we gradually approached the gate I caught sight of the guards restlessly hurrying about.

Certainly, it would be impossible to ignore a four-meter-tall, six-legged dragonmount leading a carriage and its escorts.

As far as the citizens were concerned, Shiden may as well be a new type of monster.

When we reached the town gate, two mounted guards, probably from the western gate, could be seen approaching us with tense looks on their faces.

They were either scouts or those sent to gauge our intentions.

Dylan's idea seemed to have been successful, as I doubted Lille's carriage would have provoked such a reaction on its own.

The two guards stopped a few feet away from us and had to soothe their frightened horse in the face of a dragon mount before they addressed us in a slightly threatening manner.

"Stop! State your name and the purpose of your visit immediately!"

The guard's shouting surprised his horse and caused it to jerk about violently.

Once he finally calmed down his horse, his attention was drawn towards the people sitting in Shiden's saddle and finally noticed what they were.

“My name is Dylan Targ Raratoia. When I visited this country before, I was granted an audience with the King. This time I am accompanied by a messenger of Nozan Kingdom. There is an urgent matter that must be discussed with his majesty immediately.”

Dylan tone was polite even though he was physically looking down on the guards from Shiden’s saddle.

After speaking with his partner, one of the guards went back the way he came and delivered news of Dylan’s arrival to the palace.

In the blink of an eye the news traveled through the palace and speculation about the nature of the visit ran rampant, but King Carlen simple said “Let’s speak with them first”, before making any major decisions.

Thus, all of the day’s plans were put on hold as a meeting place was hastily arranged.

King Carlon’s decision was immediately passed onto Dylan by the messenger.

The members of Lille’s delegation breathed a collective sigh of relief as their first concern had been dealt with.

While I was also relieved that the meeting arrangements had been gone smoothly, Dylan was wearing a dissatisfied expression.

He said, “I should have prepared a letter explaining our intentions and had the guard take it the first time.”

Lille had been entrusted with a letter addressed to the King of Rhoden from Nozan’s King but had we written our own letter explaining our intentions, we could have lowered our wait time.

Under the protection of mounted guards, the Nozan delegation and Dylan passed through Olav’s city gates.

If you compared the two capitals, in term of sheer scale, the entirety of Nozan’s Soulia could be fit within one-fourth of Rhoden’s Olav.

The members of the delegation were simply enamored by their surroundings

and it seemed like Lille wanted to devour the view of Olav she got from her carriage window.

“Never imagined I return to this city in such a manner.”

“That’s true.”

My muttering should have been lost in the hustle and bustle of the city, but Chiome’s cat ears managed to pick up what I said.

It must have felt strange for Chiome, who lurked in the shadows and worked to free her wrongfully enslaved people, to walk down the main street in broad daylight.

While she didn’t say anything about it, she donned her facial mask and her tail restlessly swayed about.

Beastmen still didn’t walk the streets of this country unless they were slaves, but that could change if what Dylan said came to pass.

In any case, a few citizen of the capital would occasionally let out a surprised yelp when they saw the dignified appearance of a dragon mount and the two elves that rode it, however, the carriage bearing the crest of Nozan’s royal family kept them at bay.

There was no daredevil willing to call out Chiome for being a beastmen in this situation.

After passing through the miscellaneous urban areas and briefly crossing through the luxurious residential area of the aristocrats, the King’s palace came into view.

Murmurs of admiration leaked out of the mouths of the delegation members as they took in the graceful spires that connected to the palace’s main building. There was an obvious difference between the fort-like architecture of Nozan and the elegance of Rhoden.

Our mounted guides led the delegation to the open square in the front of the palace, where a line of people waited to receive us.

Although they were caught off guard by the diversity of the delegation, a guide asked for our representative.

“Wh-Who shall act on your behalf?”

Only the voice of a small girl was heard as Lille stepped forward.

“That would be me.”

The man seemed on the verge of laughter when he heard Lille’s declaration, but when he caught sight of Nina and Zahar behind her and took note of the glares Chiome, Ariane, and I directed towards him, he immediately refrained from doing so.

“I-I understand. Allow me to guide your way.”

The man directed a smile towards Dylan, who took a position beside Lille, but otherwise remained silent as he guided us through the palace.

As we and Lille made our way inside, the carriage and Shiden were left in the care of the eight royal guards.

Lille’s eyes bulged like a child’s as she took in the gorgeous furniture and various pieces of art that decorated the halls of the Rhoden’s palace.

Eventually, our palace guide stopped in front of our presumed destination.

“Please wait in here.”

After offering us a respectful bow, he opened the door in front of us and vigilantly awaited our entrance.

Lille’s expression tightened as she straightened her posture and took a set inside the room.

Nina and Zahar closely followed behind her.

Dylan followed after them with a smile on his face, while Ariane, Chiome and I slowly entered the room behind him.

It wasn’t the auditorium I expected us to meet the King in.

Instead, the room was similar to a large conference room, and had servants waiting in the corner of the room.

I imagine those working here usually didn't allow their thoughts to show on their faces since those who were bewildered by our appearance quickly worked to conceal it.

"I didn't expect things to happen like this, given our current attire."

Speaking for myself, I was adorned in full body, carried a sword at my waist, and had Ponta throned on my head.

Both Ariane and Chiome also carried their weapons with them.

It was a good thing that Dylan, who'd negotiated on behalf of Great Canada Forest before, had come along with us.

Dylan had been accompanied by many elven warriors when he came here before, perhaps it had been a demonstration of power to help swing negotiations in his favor.

Elven warriors were rather strong and even without their weapons, it was doubtful that several human Knights could defeat them.

If I was being honest, if you gave Ariane's mother, Glenys, a single sword she could capture this entire palace without breaking a sweat.

Rhoden may be trying to annoy us a little as possible.

There was this strange tension drifting from the guards on duty.

Since Rhoden's representatives had yet to enter the room, Lille sat down with Dylan, while Nina and Zahar were taking their position behind the princess.

For the time being, Ariane, Chiome and I stood behind Dylan.

I thought we'd be left waiting for a while, but I heard fast approaching footsteps from behind the door opposite to the one we entered from.

Chapter 18: Conversation With the Royal Family

When the door in the back of the room opened, a young man and woman were the first to enter.

The young woman was slightly taller and older than Chiome.

Her blonde hair cascaded down her back in waves and her large, brown eyes perfectly matched her delicate facial features. Despite the flower-designs sewed into the collar and cuffs of her gorgeous dress, it didn't come off as too extravagant.

Her eyes contained a strength and dignity that only added to the competent atmosphere the girl projected.

Next to her was a young man.

He was tall and had fine, light-brown hair coupled with intelligent, blue eyes.

His luxurious clothes were impeccable and he effortlessly projected a princely vibe.

In combination with the thin smile on his lips, he could be said to be rather handsome.

The pair parted at the doorway and allowed an older noble to enter the room and take a slow look around.

He appeared to be in his late fifties or early sixties.

It could be said that he was aging with dignity, even with the wrinkles that were set into his forehead, his blue eyes carried a steady strength within them, a strength that was empathized by the mix of white and blonde hair atop his head and in his beard.

Given that both the young man and woman bowed towards him, I assumed that he was the King.

Both Lille and Dylan stood and tried to bow towards the older man in a

similar manner.

However, the older gentlemen stopped them with a wave of his hand.

“No need for formalities. You must be fatigued from your journey, there’s no need for formal greetings.”

Even with those words, no one attempted to sit down as Lille took a step forward.

“Thank you for your concern, your Majesty. I am Lille Nozan Soulia, first princess of Nozan Kingdom. Thank you for meeting with us on such short notice.”

Was that a practiced greeting, or was she just nervous?..... Lille gave a somewhat stiff greeting as she curtsied.

The elderly King’s eyes began to shine as he watched Lille’s small gesture.

“Oh, this belonged to Melissa.....”

Deep emotions were reflected on the king’s face and the young lady looked surprised when they heard Princess Lille’s name.

“I am King Carlen Delft Rhoden Olav. I am also your uncle.”

With a smile on his face, King Carlen began to introduce the two people beside him.

“Let me first introduce my daughter, your direct cousin and the second princess.....”

The young woman stepped forward and performed a graceful curtsy before the King could finish speaking.

“Juliana Marill Melissa Rhoden Olav. Feel free to call me Juliana.”

Lille responded to Princess Juliana with a natural smile of her own.

“And my son, the Crown Prince.”

“I am Sect Rondaro Carunon Rhoden. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Princess Lille.”

After Princess Juliana introduced herself, King Carlen drew attention to Crown Prince Sect.

Prince Sect gave Lille a quiet smile as he elegantly bowed towards her.

At that point, King Carlen directed his gaze towards Dylan.

“It hasn’t been that long since you departed, but today you are accompanied by my niece?”

King Carlen raised an eyebrow when he asked his question, but Dylan’s smile remained intact as he replied.

“It has been a while, your Highness. We have already met before, but I am Dylan Targ Raratoia, the elder of Canada’s Raratoia village. As you have said, today I act as Princess Lille’s companion.”

King Carlen eyes focused on Dylan as those words left his mouth.

“It’s surprising that you already have a connection with Nozan.”

“Well, since there is a lot of overlap between relationships, perhaps this is a mere coincidence?”

King Carlen responded to Dylan’s question with a laugh.

“Let’s have a seat before we listen to your story.”

After the King let out a small sigh he took the center seat on the opposite side of the table, with Princess Juliana and Prince Sect taking the seats at his sides.

Lille offered them a small bow before taking her seat, with Dylan following her example.

However, Zahar and Nana, who were acting as Lille’s guards, remained standing behind her.

King Carlen’s eyes briefly wandered in our direction, and Dylan was the one

that answered his unasked questions.

“These are my attendants for today, my daughter, another member of our village and one of our friends.”

The King’s eyes bulged when he heard that.

“..... There isn’t much of a resemblance.”

Dylan smiled wryly at the King’s natural response.

Ariane had been chosen as his daughter by process of elimination.

“Well, she takes after her mother.”

Ariane made a difficult expression at Dylan’s question and turned her head away.

Was it my imagination, or had her ears turned a little red?

King Carlen’s eyes glanced over Chiome and me, but he didn’t say anything in particular before turning a puzzled look towards Lille.

“So, for what reason have you traveled all the way from Nozan to visit your uncle? Is it something important?”

After King Carlen shifted the course of the conversation, Lille took out a letter and placed it on the table.

Zahar, who had stood behind her, then stepped forward to present the letter to the king before returning to his place behind Lille..

“Uncle Carlen, I’ve come to you today and ask that you hear out our request. The details have been written in the letter from my father, his Majesty Asparuf.”

With a serious expression, Lille addressed Carlen not as the King of Rhoden, but as her uncle.

King Carlen didn’t call her out on the issue, breaking the wax seal on the letter and examining its contents, his face immediately froze in an astonished visage as he read.

When they saw the change in King Carlen, both Princess Juliana and Prince Sect looked towards Lille.

“Is it true that the Hiruku Theocracy invaded Nozan, Delfuento and Salma.....? It says that the invaders number around two hundred thousand, but.....”

Princess Juliana involuntarily let out a surprised shout when she heard the questions her father asked regarding the letter, while Prince Sect had an indescribable expression on his face as he knitted his browed and stroked his chin.

“Wait a moment, Father!”

The elegant Juliana violently rose from her chair and yanked the letter out of King Carlen’s hands, while he was still in the middle of reading it, and frantically began reading it herself.

“Goodness, Juliana. I was still reading that.”

Although the King complained about his daughter’s behavior, Princess Juliana tried to authenticate the half-read letter by staring down a dumbfounded Lille and questioning her.

“Is what written here true? Has the Theocracy used wicked methods to attack the other kingdoms with undead!?”

“I-It’s the truth! I thought my life had come to an end when one of those monsters attacked me!”

In response to Princess Juliana forceful inquire, Lille’s passionate personality came out as she hastily replied.



However, Princess Juliana didn't seem interested in that particular detail as she started pacing around the room and talking to herself.

"But, doesn't the Hiruku religion have a long and benevolent history? The doctrine itself is rather ordinary, so I never expected it to be such a heretical religion.....

King Carlen let out a large sigh as he watched Princess Juliana behavior before he took up the letter and paid her no mind.

After a little while, the King lifted his head from the letter and turned his eyes to a smiling Dylan.

"It says here that the Canadian elves will be participating in the upcoming war, but if that true..... this is basically a territorial dispute between humans, right?"

Dylan began to chuckle and nodded his head at King Carlen's skepticism.

"The adversary is the Hiruku religion. If there is a cause for us to remove or weaken it, then the great elders should be all the more willing to join."

King Carlen made a worried expression when he heard Dylan's answer.

"So you're still working on this plan without higher approval?"

King Carlen looked at Dylan with a disbelieving expression on his face, yet he simply shook his head and said nothing.

"This isn't a decision that a single village elder is capable of making."

Lille and her two guards began to pale as they listened to Dylan's and the King's conversation.

..... Their worry was understandable.

In this upcoming war, the participation of the elves was indispensable when facing an undead army capable of simultaneously invading three countries.

If Maple's council of elders refused to join the war, it would spell the end of

Nozan and its neighboring countries.

However, besides their concerns, Dylan seemed confident about something.

“There’s no need to worry. Canada also has a duty to defend the people of Rouen Forest. Above all else, we must take part in the upcoming battle..... it is that type of situation.”

Listening to Dylan’s words, everyone had a strange look on their faces, but Princess Sect seemed to have noticed something because there was a smile on his face when he raised a hand towards Dylan.

Seeing the prince’s actions, Dylan tilted his head in curiosity.

“What is it, Prince Sect?”

“Assuming that Canada will participate in this war, what will Nozan be providing you in return? Is there anyone kind enough to lead a hand without seeking something in return?”

Hearing the prince’s question, King Carlen and Princess Juliana looked at Dylan, waiting for his answer.

“Nozan Kingdom and Margrave Branier of the Salma Kingdom have agreed to release their elven and beastmen slaves and make it illegal to enslave either race in the future.”

Princess Sect’s eyes narrowed at Dylan’s answer.

“That’s quite the large demand. Not only the elves but the beastmen as well.....”

When Prince Sect looked down at Chiome besides me, she received his gaze and returned a sharp bloodlust filled gaze of her own.

There was a smile plastered on his face as Prince Sect shrugged his shoulders.

“Excuse my impoliteness. If it was only a verbal agreement, are you sure they will uphold it?”

Lille's cheeks became inflamed at Prince Sect's spiteful smile and question.

"My father won't go back on his word!"

Lille's eyes began to shed tears when she slammed her hand against the table. Princess Juliana sighed and offered an apology after she and King Carlen scolded him with their eyes.

"There is no excuse for my actions. I did not mean to speak ill of your father. I'm only a bit worried. Whether or not the stated condition is guaranteed, it will determine if the Elven authority will agree to participate. Simply put, they do not know your father's character."

Prince Sect words seemed to have upset Lille again, but Dylan's smile remained ever present in front of her.

"No, I'm sorry. There's no need to worry. They are not so barbaric as to renege on their promises."

Dylan turned towards me and let out a slight chuckle.

Prince Sect seemed confused by his behavior.

I hadn't intended to force the conditions onto anyone, but it may have seemed that way on the other side.

(Heh, after that rampage no one would dare to cross you.....)

Ariane half whispered her opinion to me.

However, my own actions weren't solely responsible for that, so I rebutted her.

(If I recall correctly, only Lille-dono and a few others witnessed my outburst, but weren't you the one who turned a section of the city into a swamp, Ariane-dono?)

While Ariane and I refused to yield on the matter, Ponta's tail suddenly blocked my gaze.

“Kyun!”

I couldn't see anything but her fur.

It was like Ponta was acting as an arbitrator or something.

While in the midst of our silent battle, Lille was progressing ahead.

“Uncle Carlen, please lend us your strength to save Nozan!”

Princess Lille also turned to her father, King Carlen, after Lille made her plea.

“Temporarily assuming that the elves of Canada will participate, how much time is left before Hiruku's undead army invades?”

Dylan immediately answered King Carlen's question.

“It should be seven days at the earliest?”

“Seven days!? That's the same as saying there's no time at all!!”

Carlen let out a surprised shout when upon hearing Dylan's answer.

“Even if we left the capital now, would we even be capable of reaching Lanbaltic in seven days? Furthermore, we would still need to cross the Burugo gulf to reach the neighboring country.....”

Prince Sect calmly began counting the days.

King Carlen acknowledged his point while looking at his niece with pity in his eyes.

“Enough, Sect. Asparuf-dono probably sent her here out of worry.”

He cut Sect off with that statement.

Princess Juliana made a sorrowful expression as she stared at Lille.

In the eyes of the three of them, Lille was the last daughter of a dying country.

Well, their reactions were probably normal.

The three's pity and the meaning of their words only upset Lille even more.

"I-It'll be alright! We only left our palace today, yet we're already here! With Arc-dono's power time isn't an issue!"

Her poor choice of words, coupled with her seemingly incomprehensible explanation and assurance that there was "No problem" only seemed to draw sympathy from the others.

"What are you going to do?"

Prince Sect asked the King that question as he pitied the poor girl.

However, before King Carlen could say anything Dylan spoke up and answered the Prince's question.

"The number of days required to return with reinforcements isn't an issue. Arc-kun is accompanying me for that very reason. There's no need to worry about distance constraints."

Dylan's continued smile as he spoke his explanation, had the three of them looking at one another in confusion.

When Dylan chuckled and directed his eyes towards me I immediately understood that he wanted a "show of proof" to help them along.

After a quick nod, I invoked my magic immediately.

"Dimensional Step"

The target location was directly behind King Carlen.

"What!?" "Ha!?" "!!?"

It must have been quite shocking for a knight to suddenly disappear and reappeared behind you.

The three had temporarily forgotten how to speak as they sat there with their eyes blew wide open.

They weren't the only ones with bulging eyes.

The servants in the corners of the room were in a similar state.

“Dimensional Step”

I invoked the magic again and returned to Ariane’s side. However, only the sound of my movements filled the room, as the ability to speak still eluded them.

It was Prince Sect who broke the silence.

“.....The ‘Path of Spirits’. I thought it was a mere fairy tale.”

Sect’s words caused King Carlen and Princess Juliana to turn their heads towards Dylan, who silently nodded in return.

The ‘Path of Spirits’ seemed to be a well known elven anecdote among humans.

Maybe the tales of the Great Canada Forest’s first Chieftain, Evangeline, building transfer shrines through the forest had been passed down as an anecdote by humans.

“Surely with such an ability..... But why, Dylan-dono?”

Sweat ran down King Carlen’s face as he stared at the fearlessly smiling elf.

“Why what?”

Dylan was enjoying this situation as he tilted his head and asked King Carlen to elaborate.

“Is the cooperation of our country so important to you that you’re willing to reveal a secret ability?”

Dylan let out a slightly bitter laugh at King Carlen’s question.

“In a sense, you’re right..... As I stated before, this is an unavoidable situation for us, but the same applies to your country as well.”

Dylan gave Prince Sect a meaningful look after saying that.

Prince Sect let out a small sigh before reaching over and whispering

something into the King's ear.

"Is that so. Such a thing....."

More sweat began to form on King Carlen's forehead as he muttered to himself.

Princess Juliana glared at Prince Sect when she saw the King's reaction, but he just indifferently chuckled as he returned to his seat.

King Carlen looked over the letter once more before handing it over to Dylan, who was still smiling even now, with a look that said he'd reached a decision. Lille nervously watched the King as we awaited his answer.

"It appears that we can not afford to ignore this situation. Given the lack of time, we can probably gather five thousand soldiers. However, can the five thousand soldiers truly be taken there without issue?"

"It shouldn't be an issue."

While the King had decided to send add he been worried about the transportation for them, but Dylan quickly eased that worry.

"Very well, Sect, apart from the actual command of the forces, I entrust the planning of the Nozan reinforcement operation to you."

Lille was overwhelmed with joy at the King's decision.

However, Princess Juliana objected to King Carlen's decision.

"Please wait! Since the elves will be taking part in this just effort allow me to participate as well, father. We need to deepen our relationship with the elves after all!"

Princess Juliana made a powerful declaration, but King Carlen didn't concede on the matter.

"That is why there is something else I'd like you to handle. I'll leave this matter to Sect. That is my decision. Now settle down."

While she was dissatisfied with the King's decisions, Princess Juliana reluctantly yielded to his will.

With Princess Juliana pacified, Prince Sect respectfully kneeled before the King.

“Your orders have been received. I shall strive to meet His Majesty's expectations.”

King Carlen, merely nodded at Prince Sect's display.

“Then it is decided, as soon as the forces have been gathered, the reinforcements shall be sent to Nozan.”

After saying so Dylan looked back at me for confirmation, and I nodded in agreement.

With that, King Carlen decided to bring the meeting to an end.

While everyone began to prepare for upcoming events, I also began to look ahead towards the future.

It would be my first time transporting five thousand people, but just what was my maximum capacity?

Before that, I should find a good spot to make a drawing of this palace, as I still needed to make the transfer marker between Nozan and Rhoden.

As that thought occupied my mind, I saw Prince Sect approach Dylan as he prepared to leave the room.

Dylan glanced at him with saying anything in particular.

“Dylan-dono, I have to ask, do you plan to seek aid for Nozan from one of the Empires?”

I just managed to hear Prince Sect's whisper.

Certainly, if one of the pinnacles of human power became involved, then gathering troops would be a non-issue, but that was an impossibility.

“Unfortunately, we do not have a connection with either of the empires.....”

Dylan replied to Prince Sect with a chuckle.

..... That was also a problem.

However, Prince Sect continued to press the issue.

“Then, you would if you had those connections?”

“..... Given the circumstances, I do not believe that the participation of one of the empires is necessary.”

Prince Sect’s eyes narrowed as he apologetically lowered his head.

Nozan was the one requesting aid after all, and Dylan goal was to gain the participation of the elves. However, there was another, fatal flaw.

I couldn’t transfer to the empires with my magic.

To be precise, there were a limited number of locations inside the empires that I could travel to using my magic.

Using Transfer Gate, I was only able to travel to places I’ve been before and could clearly remember. I couldn’t just travel to places I’ve never been before.

Speaking of which, I wondered how that one imperial town I visited was doing now..... the one where I blew up that Hiruku church?

While I was nostalgically looking back on such things, Prince Sect turned a thin smile in my direction.

“Is that so, please excuse me. I look forward to working with you now and in the future.”

Prince Sect offered a small nod and left the room after saying that.

His appearance and manners marked him as the embodiment of a prince, something about him left a strong “tough to swallow” impression. While I kept my impression to myself, Ariane and Chiome seemed to be in agreement with

them, as suspicion could clearly be seen on their faces as they watched him leave.

Chapter 19: Return to The Village

In the open yard in front of Rhoden's palace.

Various personnel had been lined up here.

"Dylan-dono, when can we expect a reply from Great Canada Forest?"

King Carlen asked Dylan that question.

Dylan placed his hand on his chin and pondered the question for a while.

His eyebrow rose slightly before he answered.

".....Around three days. It should take that long to explain the situation to the great elders and organize reinforcements."

A little girl's grey eyes became clouded by worry she heard Dylan answer.

"Three days..... I am to wait here for that long....."

Dylan's sharp elven ears picked up on Lille mutters and he began to smile at her.

"I'm sorry. Having you come all this way only to have you wait for results. However, you've carried out the mission King Asparuf gave you magnificently."

Behind the princess, Zahar and Nina nodded in agreement to his statement.

"His Majesty will surely rejoice. Princess, once we return the war preparations should be well underway."

Zahar clenched his fist as he voiced his earnest opinion, while Nina gave her small master a calming smile.

"Princess Lille, there are things you can still do even if you stay here. Deeping your friendship with Princess Juliana and contributing to the post-war country

contribution is still an amazing goal.”

Nina’s words seemed to revitalize Lille, as she rose her head and spiritedly clenched her fist.

When Princess Juliana saw this, she bent down to Lille’s level and looked her right in her eyes.

“Well, since you and I are cousins, why don’t we get to know each other better while you stay here? Personally, I would like to learn about your country.”

“I understand! Friendship? Strengthening ties?”

Lille replied to Juliana with a smile and words with a smile of her own.

While watching their funny interactions brought a smile to my face, I was sitting a bit away from them drawing the location for future transfers.

When I came back to transfer the soldiers, my drawing booklet would compensate for shortcomings in my memory.

However, I would need a bit more time if I wanted to make a photorealistic representation of the palace.

Just as I’d finished the rough outlines of the drawing and was about to start on the shading when someone called out to me.

“That’s rather impressive, do you enjoy drawing?”

When my eyes sought out the person who called out to me, I saw Prince Sect standing there.

His stature and smiling figure were befitting of a prince, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that he was hiding a cold and distant personality underneath.

Atop my helmet, Ponta jerked back a little.

“Hmm, perhaps my hobby is traveling?”

My attention returned to the incomplete drawing until the feeling of someone staring at me caused me to raise my head again.

However, Prince Sect nodded his head when I looked at him..... after a quick glance at Ponta his gaze fell on me again.

“Excuse me, I’ll look forward to an answer on a later date.”

Prince Sect left after saying that.

“Ky, Kyun!”

As my helmet, Ponta let out a cautious bark towards the Prince Sect shrinking back, it seems that she had voiced her impression of the human prince.

Royalty that wore their hearts on their sleeves like Lille were a rarity after all.

Their true feelings were things that needed to be absent from their faces and placed in the back of their mind, but Ponta had a knack for sniffing out those types of people.

However, in that regard, Chiome was also someone that didn’t put her emotions out there.

My gaze wandered over to the cat-eared girl in black ninja garbs as that thought occurred to me.

Her ears restlessly moved about in every direction as several sounds caught her attention, and her long tail wagged in long arcs.

While she didn’t emote with her human features, her animal features expressed her emotions clearly, perhaps Ponta picked up on those?

After that incident with Nina, it was obvious that Chiome wasn’t emotionless, it just took a lot to bring them to the surface.

In fact, she’s at her most expressive when she eating something delicious.

While I was in the middle of that thought a pair of voluptuous breast suddenly blocked my view.

“Why’d your hand stop?”

Ariane looked directly at my face when she asked that question.

For the time being, I began drawing where I had left off, shading the coat of arms engraved into the palace walls.

“Hm, I think it should be like this, shouldn’t it?”

I placed the finished rough sketch of the transfer location in my bag before I addressed Ariane.

“Sorry, Ariane-dono. Thank you for bringing Shiden.....”

“Giyuriin.”

Shiden let out a large yawn and shook his head when I mentioned him.

The sight of the guards, who’d been curious about the Dragon Mount, unintentionally flinching back got a chuckle out of me.

“This much is alright. So, are you ready to go?”

Ariane waved away my concerns and asked if we were ready to set off.

“There’s no problem, we can transfer to Rhoden’s palace anytime.”

I give her a brief reply.

However, it was only under the current state of emergency that transferring to the royal palace was viable.

Having a foreigner (?) frequently pop into the palace was a major security risk, which would only result in an increased sense of caution and distrust.

While the Hiruku situation turned us into allies for now, the elves’ transfer magic would be seen as a threat to them once this war settled.

It was a realistic expectation given that soldiers could be transported as well.

I’d heard that a few humans were already looking into the characteristics of transfer magic, but nothing seems to have come of it yet.

As I led Shiden to the center of the plaza, where Dylan, Ariane and Chiome had gathered, I stopped to say farewell to Lille.

“Lille-dono, we will be separated for a brief period. I will do everything within my power to return to you with good news.”

Lille nodded her head at my words before looking up at me.

“I am leaving it to you, Arc-dono! I’ll be waiting for your return!”

Behind Lille, both Zahar and Nina bowed their heads to me at their master’s words, so I nodded in return.

“I’ll be off then.”

“Kyun!”

Once I returned to Ariane’s side I invoked my magic.

The destination was Raratoia, in Great Canada Forest.

“Transfer Gate!”

A moment after the large magic formation appeared at our feet, the palace was replaced with a familiar location.

The house of Ariane’s parents, Dylan’s home, stood in front of me.

Sunlight filtered through the foliage and illuminated the mansion that was blended into the tree trunk itself.

A single dark-elf stood in the beautiful garden that spread out in front of the mysterious mansion.

When the woman noticed that we materialized, she smiled and waved at us.

“Welcome back, dear! Ari-chan!”

It was Ariane’s mother and Dylan’s wife Glenys waving towards us.

In addition to the high physical abilities of dark-elves, she was a master swordswoman in her own right and Ariane’s teacher, so when she embraced Dylan it knocked the wind out of him.

“Ga!”

While that hug was somewhat of a knockout-blow, Dylan managed to endure it and greeted a slightly suspicious Glenys.

Their daughter’s ears became a deep shade of crimson as she watched her parent’s couple moment.

“Don’t do stuff like that in public.”

Puffing out her cheeks, Ariane stormed into the mansion with Chiome following behind her.

After watching his daughter walk off, Dylan’s gaze returned to Glenys in his arms.

“You finished our task earlier than I thought. Can you finally relax for a while?”

When his wife asked him that question..... Dylan could only preface his answer with an apology.

“I’m sorry, Glenys. To tell you the truth, a troublesome situation has come up over there, Arc-kun’s power brought me here, but I need to consult the great elders in the capital.....”

Dylan, who could navigate negotiations with human royalty and other nobility with dignified grace, was at a loss for words.

All of the emotion drained from Glenys’ face when she heard his explanation, and without any intonation she looked at her husband and said: “Is that so”.

Glenys had the physique of a dark-elf and actually stood a little taller than her husband. With her standing as straight as she was, and Dylan slumping as he was, even I could make out the current power dynamic of the couple.

After a brief moment of silence, Glenys turned her back on Dylan and followed Ariane and Chiome into the mansion.

Dylan, on the other hand, held his stomach and sighed as his eyebrows

lowered.

“Haa, my stomach hurts for some reason.....”

Dylan spoke in a slightly miserable tone, but from my point of view getting any kind of response was better than not getting a response at all. Maybe he thought differently?

“Dylan-dono, it’s better to be met with love rather than indifference, isn’t it?”

Dylan seemed taken back when I spoke my opinion and smiled wryly afterward.

“That certainly is an unpleasant thought.....”

His eyes narrowed as he looked in the direction Glenys had walked off in.

“In order not to make her mood worsen any further, we’d best bring an end to this crisis as soon as possible. Arc-kun, your power is essential to achieving that.”

He looked up at me as he said that.

I lightly beat my chest plate and nodded my head.

“I have a lot of home renovations I would like to work on..... I’ll do my utmost to end this endeavor.”

“Kyun! Kyun!”

Dylan seemed a bit relieved by my spirited reply and quietly breathed out a sigh.

“Then, I’ll be heading to Maple then. The entire council will probably have to convene on the matter, but having you attend should make the preceding go faster. First, we need to get you permission to enter Maple, so we should be able to set off tomorrow at the earliest?”

Dylan sought my approval on the matter after laying out a potential timetable.

If I was able to enter Maple myself it would achieve many of my goals, so I

nodded at his suggestions.

“I understand.”

“Then, I’ll be away for a little while.”

He began walking towards the small transfer shrine in the middle of the village after that.

“Giyuriiin.”

While I watched Dylan back shrinking in the distance, Shiden’s suddenly cry caught my attention.

Shiden let out another yawn and began to shake the saddle on his back.

“Oh, right. Shiden let’s return to our home and replenish our hot spring water.”

Shiden barked happily as I combed his white mane with my hand.

“Kyun.”

Atop my head, Ponta was either getting hungry or complaining about something.

“Okay, Okay We’ll make it a quick stop.”

I invoked Transfer Gateafter saying that.

Chapter 20: Forest Capital Maple

The next day, just as the sun had begun to peak over the mountains in the east.

In front of Raratoia's small transfer shrine.

The structure was built into a tree in a similar manner to Dylan's mansion, with the branches and leaves above casting a shadow over the area.

Ponta sat atop my helmet as Ariane tried to suppress a yawn, while Dylan stood ahead of us since the village elder would be our guide today.

As a People of the Mountains and Plains, Chiome would require special permission to enter Maple, so she would be staying behind with Glenys today.

When we entered the shrine, the first thing I noticed were the tall pillars that supported the entire structure.

In the center of the shrine was a circular, elevated platform that had a faintly glowing magic formation etched into it.

Dylan briefly spoke with the elf in charge of the transfer shrine before we all stepped onto the platform, the formation shining brightly as a floating sensation overtook us.

When the lights settled, we were in another location.

While the structure of the building remained unchanged, the scale of everything was larger..... instead of one magic formation, there were multiple platforms in the room.

Unlike the small shrine from before, there were multiple guards in the more furnished and decorated room..... it seems we'd successfully transferred to Maple's shrine.

After exchanging a few words with the guards and a few other people, Dylan ushered us towards the shrine's exit.

“Hmm, so we’ve arrived at Maple, the center of elven power.”

“Kyun!”

Despite the less than ideal circumstances that brought us here, I was a bit excited about setting foot in the elven capital I couldn’t visit until now, even Ponta’s fluffy tail swayed from side to side as she let out an excited cry from the top my helmet.

Ponta..... since fluffy foxes were a rarely seen spirit beast, she was gathering a lot of attention from the elves.

The scenery completely changed when we left the shrine under the gazes of the crowd.

In contrast to the quiet Raratoia, a sprawling city had opened up before me.

While there were a few tree buildings in Raratoia, the streets here were lined with them, paved roads running up and down the streets and a multitude of elves were going about their own business.

Even though it was in the early hours of the morning store owners were already barking into the crowd for potential customers.

The energy here was higher than in any human market I’d been to, and just watching it all filled with a sense of wonder and vigor.

Among the streams of elves, several unexpected figures caught my attention.

They were around a hundred and thirty centimeters tall.

Although the size of children, but their arms were thick and log-like, their bodies had a stout build to them, their ears were slightly pointed and they had beards that extended to their waist. It was obvious that they were far from being any type of elf.

“Ariane-dono, these.....”

Ariane seems to have anticipated my question and answered me without looking back.

“Those are the dwarves. As far as humans are concerned they died out long ago, but they’ve resided in Maple for quite some time.”

Dylan turned around and added a warning to her explanation to me.

“Of course, it’s a secret that they are living here.”

When Dylan turned back around, Ponta and I both nodded our heads in understanding.

As we followed Dylan, Ariane began filling me in on the secret history of the dwarves. Eventually, we came upon the largest of the tree-buildings.

“Hmm, the humans hunted the dwarves for their metallurgy technology.....”

Ariane pointed her index finger at me when I interrupted her history lesson.

“First chieftain Evangeline decided to protect them, so don’t tell a soul outside of the forest. Understand that, Arc.”

Ariane looked me directly in the eye as she pushed her warning on me.

“Even if you tell me that, I already carry the name ‘Raratoia’.”

“Kyun!”

I pounded my chest armor to convey my comprehension.

Ponta joined in and stuck out her chest.

When she noticed the gazes of the surrounding people watching our exchange Ariane froze for a moment.

It seems that a silver knight stood out wherever he went, when I looked around, everyone seemed to be staring at me.

Ariane didn’t seem to like the attention so she began chasing after Dylan, who’d already left the area, and I began following behind her.

The city of Maple was an exciting spectacle to behold, while the tree-buildings resembled high-rises from my former world, the organic plant matter

they were composed of reminded me of both a futuristic and fantastical setting.

Those aerial walkways between some of the larger buildings would be a difficult feat to achieve, even with modern building technology.

I was deprived of the view when Ariane began tugging the edges of my mantle, urging me to follow after Dylan, who'd pulled ahead again.

"Should we visit again sometime? Chiome-chan and a bunch of other people are waiting for us, so we should finish things up first. However, I understand how you feel."

"Sorry, it's just such a spectacle....."

With Ariane's suggestion, I reined in my emotions and began hastening my pace towards our destination.

Eventually, the buildings gave way to a large, open space.

A tower which soared well above the conventional buildings, seemingly piercing the sky, stood in the center of that space.

While its canopy was rather sparse compared to the Dragon King's Tree, this tree's trunk was thicker and it definitely stood taller. The tree deviated from the shape people associated with trees, resembling a baobab more than anything.

"..... like the mythical Tower of Babel."

I unconsciously nodded and said "exactly" to my own observation.

Dylan was heading directly towards the giant tree tower.

The group of guards stationed at the base of the Tower of Babel took notice of me as I approached.

Dylan called out to the guards and spoke with them for a bit, after which the guards prompted us to enter, so Ariane and I did so.

The inside resembled the lobby of a high-class office-building. There was even a receptionist sitting at a desk, who greeted us with a smile.

When the receptionist caught sight of Dylan she signaled for a female guide, who stepped forward and urged him to follow her.

The guide took us to a collection of cylindrical rooms and herded us into one of them.

The cylindrical room wasn't that large and sparsely furnished. There was an elevated platform with a crystal ball embedded in its center.

It gave me an impression of a small fortune-teller's station, but when our guide placed her hand on the ball, it began emitting light before I felt a floating sensation.

"Oh?"

I was a bit surprised when the circular platform soundlessly began to climb the cylindrical room.

It was just like an elevator.

No, it may be more advanced than that give its mechanisms.

There weren't any wires in the room, the floor itself just rose under its own power.

It was a type of elevator you'd see in a Sci-Fi anime, I wandered around the platform and examined it out of curiosity, enjoying the mystical feeling to it all.

The guide gave me a wry smile, whereas Ariane's face had turned a shade of red.

Eventually, the floating sensation and the platform stopped and our guide prompted us out of the room.

When we got off the elevator, there was a bridgeway that connected the various sections of the tower to one another, overlookin the entirety of Maple.

The spectacular scenery was so inviting I wasn't able to stop myself from walking up to the window and basking in it.

“Oh, such an amazing view.....”

The view of the city filled with tree-buildings spread out below me, I could even see a dome-like sports stadium from here.

A magnificent lake that seemed like the sea stretched from the northern and southern edges of the city, the thick morning fog making it seem like the few fishing boats I could make out were sailing in the sky,

This breathtaking view alone would be enough for me to recommend this place as a World Heritage Site.

However, I also remembered that there were various other locations I would've liked to nominate.

The Dragon Valley, the Dragon King's Tree, the Black Forest and the Kinrei Mountains on the Southern Continent, were all beautiful if you took away the monsters.

Revisiting the different locations in my memories caused me to let out a sigh until Ariane's tugging on my mantle dragged me back to reality.

“Hey, you'll be left behind if you don't hurry up.”

When I looked towards the source of the comment I saw Ariane's troubled expression. Dylan and our guide were looking back at us as they waited.

“Sorry, it was just.....”

I apologized to Ariane and advanced until we came upon a set of luxurious doors.

Both doors were decorated with vividly colored plants and entangled ivy.

Since Dylan and I had planned this meeting in advance, I took my canteen from my waist and began drinking the spring water I collected this morning through the gaps in my helmet.

While I prepared myself, our guide and Dylan entered the room and we were granted permission to follow shortly after.

Beyond the flashy doors, there were a few decorations and a little furniture in the room.

The room was rather large, but it's most eye-catching feature had to be the huge central round table and the eleven people sitting around it.

There was neither a higher or lower seat, it was a round-table-meeting.

While the majority of the people seated were regular elves, there was a warrior-like dark elf and a dwarf as well.

These people were the apex of the Great Canada Forest's power.....

In other words, they were the ten great elders and the third generation chieftain.

They took a look at us as we entered the room before exchanging words with the person seating closest to them.

Most of the gazes were directed at me, but they were more of a systematic evaluation of the man in full body armor than anything else. I couldn't help but not to be the main topic of discussion.

"It has been a while..... Elder Dylan."

The elven man that sat furthest away from us was the first to speak up.

Chapter 21: Great Elder Meeting

The man looked to be in his forties and had a calm atmosphere about him. His green-tinged, blonde hair was rather long and braided into a complex style and he wore tasteful jewelry around his neck and other locations on his body.

At first glance, he seemed to be a dignified person.....

He was the third generation chieftain, Brian Boyd Evangeline Maple.

The noise settled down after he spoke up.

Dylan bowed to him before greeting the other members of the council.

“Thank you all for relenting to my selfish request and gathering here today. Chief Brian, thank you for sparing your extremely valuable time to speak with me.”

Looking at Dylan’s lowered head, Brian chuckled and said:

“Well, in this case I think it’s a good opportunity for me. That’s why I set up this meeting and asked everyone to attend. Proceed as you wish.”

Brian’s words caused a few of the elders to stare at him in surprise.

If I wasn’t mistaken, Brian seemed rather interested in the story Dylan had to tell.

Before the meeting had even begun, the chieftain had already unbalanced things.

Dylan took a look around the room and gave Brian an understanding nod while the chief gave him a small smile.

“Before we begin the latest discussion, allow me to introduce the newest brethren to join my village. Arc-kun.”

Some people had a dubious expression when they heard Dylan's statement.

I took a step forward and placed my hands on my helmet.

Ponta let out a groan and moved down to my shoulder before I removed my helmet.

"My name is Arc Raratoia. A pleasure to make your acquaintance."

I bowed after my simple self-introduction.

Ponta moved from my shoulder to my back and vice versa in order to avoid falling, but nobody paid any attention to that amusing scene.

"I've never seen a fellow like this before."

"A brethren with red eyes, black hair and brown skin?"

"Though his ears are those of an elf, he's built like a dark-elf."

"The differences are greater than I thought....."

The ten elders set forward in their seats and voiced their impression of me.

Some had known of my existence before my arrival, while others were utterly surprised by my appearance and others still doubted that I was an elf.

While various exclamations were still flying about, Dylan continued his explanation.

"He, my daughter Ariane and one other person, a girl of the People of the Mountains and Plains, accompanied me on my trip to Rouen Forest. From there they traveled to the human kingdom Nozan and proceeded to help one of the country's royals."

Several people seemed confused by the contents of Dylan's story and stared down at him.

"To make a long story short, when the royal family requested their assistance they relented under certain conditions, and successfully helped the human nation."

As he talked Dylan reached into his breast pocket, took out a piece of paper, opened it and placed it on the table.

“This is a simple map of the country they helped, Nozan Kingdom, which is located here. And this is Rouen forest, where Doranto village is located.”

Dylan began explaining the map, but one of the great elders raised an eyebrow.

“What’s the relation between the map and what you said before? Could you summarize things a bit more.”

However, when the elder felt Brain’s gaze on the back of his head, he folded his arms and said nothing more.

“Thank you. Although everyone is aware that we dispatched a relief force to aid Doranto after they suffered large casualties, does anyone know what caused said damage in the first place?”

Dylan paused for a moment and waited for a response, but no one spoke up so he went ahead with his story.

“Initially it was believed that a powerful monster had attacked Doranto..... but in actuality, the culprit was a man-made unit of undead.”

The majority of the great elders were surprised by what he said.

“Artificial undead!? They were created by human hands!?”

“That’s ridiculous!! Does the technology to create undead even exist!?”

“Wait, wait! How can you be sure that humans created them?”

Once the surprised outburst and doubts had settled, Dylan continued with his story.

“We can be certain that the undead were man-made because a high-ranking member of the organization that created them, a cardinal of the Hiruku religion, revealed that information..... his position was comparable to that of the elders gathered here now.”

The great elders looked at one another and questioned the legitimacy of what he said.

“The cardinal had attacked the Nozan Kingdom using those artificial undead, but was defeated by Arc-kun and the others I mentioned before. I was informed of the situation shortly after that, but things appear to be worse than I anticipated.....”

Dylan marked the countries to the north and south of Nozan, Delfuento Kingdom and Salma Kingdom, on the map and used a pen to place an X over the places their capitals were located.

“The Hiruku Theocracy organized an undead army and attacked Salma Kingdom’s capital. The army numbers around two hundred thousand. It was a scouting party of that two hundred thousand strong army that attacked Doranto.”

Chief Brian let out a large sigh as he listened to Dylan’s story.

Judging by his reaction, he’d probably heard everything in advance.

However, the eyes of most of the people were blown wide open as they digested the information.

The few elders whose reaction was similar to Brian’s must have already heard about the report before and were now seeking confirmation of the facts.

I guess they wouldn’t be able to simply judge that Dylan’s story was a lie when it came time to make the final decision.

“Assuming that what you’ve said is factual, the scouts of that large undead army attacked Doranto? Does that mean that the entirety of that army will flow in the village in the near future?”

Dylan silently nodded at one of the elder’s question.

“Additionally, another army of similar size to the one that has invaded Salma Kingdom has already destroyed the capital of Delfuento. Rescuing Doranto is without question, but Nozan Kingdom will be under siege from four hundred thousand enemies from the north and south.”

Although Dylan pushed forward with the story as he pointed out things on the map, one of the Great Elders voiced a question.

“I’m a bit confused, I understand that this is a situation where we must rescue our people, but are you suggesting we save this human country as well? Why is that?”

A few of the other elders nodded along with what the one elder had said.

“Let’s talk about the conditions Arc-kun put in place when he helped the country some time ago. The conditions that Nozan accepted were ‘the emancipation of all elven and beastmen slaves and a severe punishment for any unjust enslavement in the future to be imposed. ”

The great elders’ gazes alternated between Dylan’s and my face when they heard that.

“A human country would never accept such conditions! Rather, what exactly did he do that could make a country swallow such conditions!?”

It was unavoidable for them to think so.

Dylan had yet to explain that I’d annihilated the army of one hundred thousand undead that had been sent to Nozan.

If he brought up such an absurd claim first, any credibility that Dylan had had would have vanished, so he’d deliberately downplayed it till now.

“The lord of a vast human territory of a neighboring country has also agreed to those conditions. I don’t wish for a country willing to accept those conditions to disappear. Two countries have already been destroyed by the Hiruku Theocracy’s undead army. These two are the only human leaders that remain. If they are crushed, then the future of the elves and beastmen in that area will be lost.”

Chief Brain followed after Dylan with an argument of his own.

“While that is certainly true, this is also the biggest chance we have to weaken the Hiruku Theocracy’s influence. According to the two human rulers, the Hiruku church seemed to be controlled by the Cardinals and the Pope. We can

shake the Religion at its foundation.”

Some of the great elders nodded at Brain’s remark.

Although one of the elders timidly asked Chief Brian a question.

“Ho-However, are we sure that the humans will fulfill those conditions? I’m worried that those guys will immediately go back on their word.....”

The elder next to the one that made that comment smiled and tried to refute his opinion.

“Shouldn’t a show of force squash any rebellious intent?”

Some of the elders nodded at her remark.

Dylan picked up the conversation after that last comment.

“Even if we don’t cooperate with the humans this time, the fight with the man-made undead is unavoidable.”

Many of the elders asked Dylan to elaborate on what he meant by that comment.

“Please think about it for a moment. Although we do not know how they are making them, the Hiruku church has a method for creating undead. I don’t know the details of their magic but I understand that it has one required element.”

Silence overtook the room as all eyes were directed at Dylan.

However, on the opposite side of the room, Brian was the one that finally spoke.

“Corpses.”

Brian’s one word caused an unpleasant tension to run through the room.

Everyone seemed to realize it.

The majority of the undead soldiers we’d seen were skeletons equipped with metal armor.

Considering the necessary manufacture cost for each of them, it would be one set of armor..... and one skeleton.

How would one go about procuring the necessary human skeletons?

If I were running the Hiruku Religion, the first thing I would do was raise the dead after the funeral service.

Then there would be the bodies of the people that died during a recent war, or the corpses from a conquered city. I don't know how many undead they can raise in a day, but I imagine that the Hiruku's undead horde would drastically increase in size each time they created a mountain of corpses.

The undead army would multiply like rats.

Hiruku's doctrine oppressed elves and beastmen after all, so why wouldn't they declare war on those races after they finished swallowing the surrounding nations?

Ariane seemed to have just realized this fact as her golden eyes were wide open when she looked up at me.

The great elders had wary expressions as they looked at Dylan, but with no one offering a different strategy, only silence remained.

The option of non-involvement was already off the table, it wasn't hard to imagine the situation becoming uncontrollable if the Hiruku religion wasn't dealt with now.

One of the elders cleared their throat and brought up the next issue.

"It is obvious that the Hiruku Theocracy can't be left alone. Obviously, but how can we deploy our soldiers from here? Even if we gathered the warriors and shipped them from Landfria and Saskatoon, do we even have enough ships?"

Another elder rose their own concerns after hearing that question.

"While transportation is an issue..... the first problem is gathering our forces. Against the army of four hundred thousand undead, even if we called for the warriors of every village in Canada, would they even reach ten thousand? As

Dylan-dono has said, cooperation with the humans might be necessary.”

Everyone began to consider the points the two elders had raised.

Meanwhile, Dylan straightened his posture and directed his gaze towards me.

..... Looks like I was up.

“There are possible solutions to those issues. The problem of transportation can easily be handled by the newest member of my village, Arc-kun.”

After Dylan looked around the room he called out my name as the signal.

I nodded and immediately invoked my magic.

“Dimensional Step”

I vanished while everyone’s attention was on me, and the next moment, when I materialized behind chief Brain, all of the elders began looking around the place I had been moments before.

“He vanished!?” “Nonsense!”

While most of the elders were caught off guard by my disappearance, the large dark elf elder, who I was told was Ariane’s grandfather Fangas, immediately located where I was..... Chief Brain began to chuckle when he looked over my shoulder and saw me.

“There hasn’t been a transfer magic user since the first chieftain.....”

Brian’s statement lead everyone to finally realize what had happened. Not only those who had been completely unaware, even those who had been informed by Dylan ahead of time were surprised.

It was more shocking to see something than it was to hear about it.

One curious great elder nearly fell out of his chair in order to ask his questions.

“I’ve never seen transfer magic like that before! That’s!?! How far can your magic go, how much can you take with you!?”

The elder waited with bated breath for my answer, so I informed him of everything I knew.

“I can use two types of transfer magic, long-distance and short-distance. I just demonstrated my short range magic, the long-distance magic allows me to travel to locations I’ve visited before, its only limitation is my memory of the location. I have yet to test the limits on how much I can take with me.”

The surrounding people attentively listened to what I had to say while I answered the elder’s questions.

Meanwhile, one of the female great elders slowly approached me, her eyes shined a lustrous green as she ran her fingers over the Holy Armor of Belenus and she asked another question.

“Can you travel to another location from here?”

Opposed to her title as great elder the woman appeared to be in her early thirties, but it was hard to gauge her true age since she was an elf.

For some reason, Ariane glared at us with angry eyes.

When I heard “Me too!” “Same here!” as other elders rose their hands, I looked to Dylan for direction.

Dylan nodded his head once, it seems he judged their wish should be granted and that they should experience it at least once.

“When the three of you are standing next to me..... let’s take a trip to Doranto.”

The female elder looked pleased by what I said as she moved to my side and lightly stroked Ponta’s chin.

“Kyun.”

Ponta let out a deep purr as if she liked the woman’s fingers.

In addition to the two people who’d already voiced their interest in experiencing transfer magic, Ariane’s grandfather Fangas and chief Brian also

stood up and joined us.

So I would be taking five people with me.

Dylan smiled warily at my circumstances.

Since I would be taking them to Doranto village it was necessary to memorize the image of the room first.

Thanks to the large round table and the room's calm atmosphere it was easy enough to remember it for a short time..... afterward, I brought up the characteristics of Doranto in my head.

“Let's go, Transfer Gate.”

The great elders let out a surprised shout when the magic formation appeared at our feet and consumed us. The light overtook the room for a moment before darkness fell, when it passed we were in another location.

“Oh! There's no mistaking those three trees! That's Doranto village!”

One of the great elders delightfully pointed out the three trees and the cityscape surrounding their roots.

Another of the elders restlessly looked around before pulling up a few blades of grass and casually began chewing on it.

“.....Bitter. This isn't a hallucination or something of the like.....”

The elder seemed to be absorbed in observing the surroundings while he muttered to himself.

“No, this is quite splendid.”

A full smile briefly appeared on Chief Brian's face as he spoke.

My long ears appeared to be quite sensitive as I could pick up the sounds of war preparations as I looked towards Doranto.

Elder Fargas appeared to hear the same thing I was, given that he was glaring in the same direction I was.

“Dylan-dono is waiting for us so we should return. Transfer Gate”

I prevented the elders from wandering off and invoked the transfer magic again, this time bringing the large room in Maple to mind.

We returned as if our excursion had been a lie. The elders were surprised by our sudden return, and Dylan had a wry smile while Ariane let out a large sigh.

“Bitter..... this transfer magic is genuine”

The elder who had chewed on the grass on our trip to Doranto was the first to speak.

He’d brought back some grass and popped it into his mouth to judge its authenticity.

“It was a valuable and fun experience.”

On the other hand, the female elder gave me a flirtatious glance and sweetly whispered into my ear.

“Kyun?”

Ponta suddenly reacted to something, but before I could figure out what, I suddenly felt something tugging at me from behind.

“Welcome back. Arc.”

When I looked back, Ariane welcomed me back with a voice so sharp it stung like a thorn.

“Well, I’m convinced that his cooperation solves the transportation issue. All that is left is our war potential, but we can borrow the power of a Dragon King for that. I think some of you were already aware, but Ferufivisurotte-sama is visiting today.”

The great elders seemed very pleased by Dylan’s explanation.

“Oh, if Ferufivisurotte-sama were to lend her strength there would be no need to worry!”

“Can we really borrow the power of the one considered to be the most wicked of the Dragon Kings?!”

“However, Ferufivisurotte-sama’s cooperation is.....”

Some elders spoke joyous about the suggestion, while others had a more subtle reaction.

“.....To be honest, borrowing power carries its own problem.”

Even Dylan, the one who had suggested it, lowered his eyes.

The faces of the elders became clouded at his short statement.

Dylan received their gazes, before embarrassingly looking towards me.

The atmosphere became even more clouded as a strange muffled voice reached our ears from outside the door.

Oh, is it finally my turn. I was tired of waiting, Dylan.

When the elders started looking around, the double doors were blow opened by a gust of wind that blew into the room.

“What!?”

“Kyun!?”

“!?”

I knelt down a little as Ariane ducked behind me to block the wind.

Ponta was blown off my shoulder, but somehow managed to

fight against the wind attach herself to Ariane’s back.

When the gust stopped I noticed two shadows standing at the entrance.

Chapter 22: Dragon King Ferufivisurotte

A rather large woman entered the room in a dignified manner..... while revealing her figure to me.

She stood around two meters tall, but the two black horns that sprouted from her head added even more to her height.

She had long, wind-blown, bluish-purple hair and the reptilian eyes she used to look over everyone matched her hair color.

A small set of wings grew out of her back, while her voluptuous chest and her white abdomen were exposed in a tantalizing manner that attracted the male gaze. However, in contrast to her revealing attire the women's shoulders, lower body and arms were covered in armor-like, black scales.

An armored tail which exceeded her own height with was attached to her lower back and ended in a crystal-like, sword-shaped point.

It was obvious that she wasn't human.

Considering the conversation just now, and the fact that I knew another person with a similar appearance, her words made it obvious who she was.....

“Dragon King, Ferufivisurotte-dono.....”

My utterance focused her attention on me and her lips lifted into a small smile.

“That'sRight. Ah, I'm certain I made that clear when I called out and busted in, Jiyajajajan, didn't I? Don't you agree?”

She tilted her head and rubbed her index finger against her chin as she spoke.



The armor wrapped around her seductive body and her eyes gave off an overwhelming sense of intimidation..... yet, despite her intense personality, she spoke with a pseudo-Kyoto dialect.

She didn't carry the regal atmosphere befitting of the apex of power, like Dragon King Williahsfim did.

However, the effects of standing before an overwhelming existence made my skin crawl.

Ariane cleared her throat and took a step from behind my back.

There was another person standing behind Ferufivisurotte, she was a dark elf like Ariane, with shoulder-length hair and her golden eyes were sending a powerful glare in my direction.

Her face resembled Glenys' a little bit, but the mystery was immediately solved when Ariane blurted out "Onee-san!?".

Ariane's sister, I sure her name was Ivana..... Ivana Glenys Maple.

Dylan suddenly appeared before Ferufivisurotte with a bitter smile and lowered his head after giving me a quick glance.

Ferufivisurotte watched his actions for a moment but turned a full smile towards me.

"Hum, Arc Raratoia. Certainly an interesting existence. My soul has stirred. You're just like Eva."

When she said that, I noticed chieftain Brian reacting from the corner of my eye.

Ferufivisurotte didn't even glance towards him though, as her long tail rose up and began approaching me, the tip slowly examining me from head to toe.

"I've already heard everything from Dylan. I have no problem with lending you my power in the upcoming war. I'll say yes if you come with me. Well?"

Ferufivisurotte's reptilian eyes narrowed as she stared at me.

There wasn't that much of a difference between our heights, so it was impossible to evade her gaze.

"Hmm, I'll cooperate if I can. What should I do?"

The corners of her mouth rose up after she heard my reply.

"A quick responseuh. Good, Good. I'm not gonna go and eat you or anything. I would just like you to provide me with a bit of entertainment."

She raised her scaled-armor hand and pointed her finger towards me.

While I was puzzled by Ferufivisurotte's request, she slowly pulled her tail back and stuck the crystal sword into the floor at her feet.

"I'd like to play with you in Maple's arena. I wish to enjoy this since it's been awhile since I've left my home, you see? How about it?"

Her voluptuous body shuddered as she gave me a fearless smile along with her question.

I somehow managed to endure her chest threatening to spill over and digested the content of what she'd said.

Normally, Ariane would have joined the conversation by now, but not even she was able to break into the conversation in Ferufivisurotte's presence.

Still, I felt the gaze of someone looking at me from behind.

Well, Ferufivisurotte's condition seemed to be that I play with her in the arena, but it was obvious that the two of us wouldn't be digging a tunnel or making a mountain in the sandbox.

I'd already grasped that much due to Dylan's behavior.

He'd asked Ferufivisurotte to participate in the upcoming war beforehand, and it seems her condition was based on a pre-existing interest in me.

Dylan had been keeping quiet about it until now, was it because he thought I

could fight her equally, was it to limit my options ahead of time or did the dragon king place a gag order on him?

Ferufivisurotte suddenly began to chuckle.

She said I was “just like Eva” earlier.

She was most likely referring to the first chieftain Evangeline. Ferufivisurotte had said that she and I were the same.

Based on what I had already learned about her, I’d already humored the possibility that she’d been in the same situation I was in, but now my interest in her could no longer be left on the fringes of my mind.

I considered all of this and let out a deep sigh.

“What are the rules and the date of the game? Ferufivisurotte-dono.”

Ferufivisurotte happily nodded her head in response to my question.

Maple’s arena was a considerably large building.

It’s exterior was modeled after the Roman amphitheaters, so it was reminiscent of the Coliseum. Large trees were planted in equal intervals from one another like pillars and all of them were fused into the building’s stone walls.

The inside had a very different atmosphere.

First of all, there were very few audience seating sections.

Rather than surrounding the battlefield, the audience seats were separated from it by a ditch and fence. The seats were also raised two or three stories above the battlefield.

It was probably because of the arena’s stage occupying most of the available area that they weren’t able to use it for entertainment purposes.

According to Ariane, the arena was rarely used for recreational purposes and

it had been built as a warrior training center.

Since the facility was a training ground, there were gates located on the western and eastern ends of the arena. The western gate was said to be connected to the forest outside of Maple..... In other words, it was a direct passage to the Great Canada Forest.

Monster would be led inside the arena for the warriors to learn how to fight them, or to safely observe their behavior.

Of course, there were occasions when monsters were let in through the gate and gladiator-like bouts were held, but those events were held by seasoned warriors and they didn't allow spectators to watch them.

However, the arena's limited seats were bustling with the sounds of a large crowd as many people had flocked here today.

Elves, dark elves and dwarves filled nearly every seat and were giving their full attention to the battleground, but how did they manage to hear about this?

We'd just left Maple's main tower, Dylan called it the Central Institute, a little while ago..... after Ferufivisurotte's appearance in the meeting room and demanding that we crossed swords in order to secure her participation in the war.

It was around noon now and we'd just arrived because we had to wait for the arena to be prepared for us.

Had she deliberately set this up or were so many people so starved for entertainment that news of her arrival had already circulated through the populace?

Either way, in order to defeat the undead enemy it was necessary for us to face them on two fronts.

To strike the enemies invading from Delfuento Kingdom and Salma Kingdom, one frontline needed a powerful ally to act as its main fighting force.

Her way of speaking was a bit strange, but the aura she possessed was the same as Williahsfim's.

In order to motivate her, it was necessary to entertain her first, but the viability of doing so..... the existence of the truly capable individuals in this world had dealt a blow to my self-confidence.

In all likelihood, Ferufivisurotte was one of those capable people.

I looked toward the nearest section of seats and saw that Brian, the ten great elders, Ariane, her sister Ivana and Dylan were all watching the battlefield.

The green fur ball that was Ponta, sat in-between Ariane's and Ivana's arms.

After looking at all of them, I descended to the battlefield from the eastern gate.

Ferufivisurotte had yet to appear.

The crowd grew louder when I arrived on the stage.

Many of the spectators were warrior-like elves, and give that I would be fighting beside them soon a poor showing here would be a hindrance in the war.

I stepped forward with Holy Shield of Teutatesin hand and drew the Holy Thunder Sword.

As if she were waiting for that moment, a whirlwind suddenly appeared in the sky as Ferufivisurotte was using her small wings to flutter in the air.

It didn't seem like I'd have to fight her in her dragon form.

I didn't know how large she was in her dragon form, but if she was larger than Williahsfim, it would have been difficult for her to fight in the arena.

At worst, I imagine that the arena would have been reduced to rubble.

..... so my worries were lessened a little.

The whirlwind dispersed once Ferufivisurotte landed in the arena.

She was met with cheers from the spectators.

"It's getting noisier and noisier, hehe: I hope I'll be able to enjoy this. Let's

get things going.”

The moment she said that Ferufivisurotte kicked the ground and instantly closed the distance between us.

No, it would be more accurate to compare the speed with which she moved to that of a missile’s. She raised her armor-like, scaled hand and plunged it towards me.

It was a momentary decision..... I raised my shield, but nearly lost hold of it as the impact caused me to unintentionally step back, right into the range of her next attack.

“Fuck!?”

The sound of large metal masses colliding with one another reverberated throughout the arena.

“He he, proud of blocking just that?”

When I heard her bouncy voice, the foreboding sensation I felt caused me to instinctively retreat.

My premonition proved to be correct, as her long crystal sword-tipped tail swooped down from overhead.

I’d manage to dodge by a hair’s breadth, and the crystal sword pulverized the ground where I’d just been standing.

“Oyaa, I was sure I struck from your blind spot. Your reaction time is pretty good.”

Ferufivisurotte chuckled when she said that before she brandished her tail again and resumed her attack.

Not even I would get away unscratched if I received a blow from that.

When the crystal sword came down on me again I repelled it with my own sword.

I was at an overwhelming disadvantage if I remained on the defensive.

The opponent had both her hands and tail at her disposal, and even her legs might be able to deal fatal blows given the power they had. There were so many troublesome things.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that without my powerful kinetic vision and Glenys' training, I wouldn't have been able to ward off her surge of attacks.

Every attack, every single attack was like receiving a blow from a giant.

The moment one blow was blocked, another one had to be repelled with the Holy Thunder Sword in my other hand.

After another spray of sparks, she grabbed hold of my sword with her scaled hand.

It was a mythical grade weapon capable of cutting normal monsters in half, furthermore, it had even been able to cut Williahsfim's body, yet it didn't seem to be a match for her armor.

The unpleasant sound of metal creaking filled the arena.

I caught sight of the spectators frowning in the corner of my eye.

When I put my full strength into it, she fearlessly smiled as she used her other arm to brace the one that was holding my sword in place.

"Really, is it shocking to face an equal in a show of strength?"

This deadlock she'd created..... had created an opening for her extremely long tail.

I took advantage of her goodwill.

"Stone Fangs!"

The ground at Ferufivisurotte feet swelled before they turned into spikes and attacked her.

However, she calmly back-flipped away to dodge them, before attacking the

spikes with her crystal sword tip.

All of the spikes were reduced to rubble and scattered around the battlefield.

With her defenses, it hadn't even been necessary to avoid the first attack, but she seemed to be truly enjoying this fight and sincerely dodged them.

This was all just a game to her.

"Casting magic in an instant. Well, the power wasn't bad."

I'd wanted to inflict a wound on the laughing dragon king, but I couldn't even scratch her, let alone hurt her.

Holding back was useless.

"Flying Dragon Slash!"

For the moment we were a medium distance away from one another and out of her tail's range, so I followed up with a second and third Flying Dragon Slash.

However, she repelled all of them with her arms and tail, none of them reached her.

When she canceled out the attack, the surplus of energy wound up being directed towards the ground, resulting in dust clouds completely concealing her from view.

If she were invisible to me, I must have been invisible to her.....

"Lightning Storm!!"

Earth magic would be incapable of penetrating her defenses, so I tried to use lightning magic.

The atmospheric pressure suddenly changed as the air became charged.

In the next moment, an ear splitting crash of thunder cut through the arena before blinding flashes of lightning struck the ground.

Since the arena was so large I managed to use the magic without hitting the bleachers, but the flash and loud boom seemed to cause some secondary damage.

Many of the spectators were clutching their ears and crouching on the ground.

The elves' sensitive hearing had an unfortunate drawback.

As for Ferufivisurotte herself, though the ground around her had been charred black, she stood there perfectly fine.

Judging from her state, she appeared to have created some type of barrier to prevent a thunderbolt from striking her.

I was the ant in this situation..... I grumbled to myself while thinking of another strategy.

“Haa, that was surprising. It really was. But, why did you lower the power?”

“Muu.....”

Ferufivisurotte brushed the dust out of her long bluish-purple hair as she spoke, but she'd still detected the slightest shift in the flow of my own mana.

I'd been afraid of the collateral damage if the area of effect was too large, so I unconsciously held back. What type of senses did she possess?

While I was thinking about such things, she started on her own.

“Heya, here I come!!”

Six photospheres emerged around her when she said that and they instantly came flying towards me in a straight line.

They cut through the air in an instant, and when I dodged the spheres I heard a dull sound before one of them hit the ground and set off a small explosion.

I managed to avoid the attacks somehow, but gouges appeared all over the arena with each explosion, I nearly lost my footing multiple times.

In the edge of my sight, I could see new spheres forming around Ferufivisurotte before they were sent flying after me.

..... I'd become a target at a shooting range.

“Dimensional Step!”

I invoked my short range transfer magic and materialized in her blind spot behind her.

When I vanished and instantaneously appeared behind Ferufivisurotte, I could clearly hear the spectator's astonished gasps.

“Sacred Lightning Sword!”

Blue electricity sprung from the hilt of my sword, causing the blade to transform into a lightsword twice its original size, which emitted a crackling sound as it came into contact with the air.

“Ohh? That's interesting.”

She had already grasped my location, and her lips twisted in a strange manner when she acknowledged the lighting blade.

All of her photospheres simultaneously flew towards me, but I cut them down with the Holy Thunder Sword. Some of the spheres vanished while other flew off and exploded around the arena.

When I noticed that the dust was drifting towards Ferufivisurotte I realized that she was currently stationed downwind from me. Since it was a rare opportunity, I used transfer magic to move into her blind spot.

“Dimensional Step”

My lighting blade was primed to strike..... I invoked the transfer magic several times before I swung at her from behind. However.....

Bachiiinn!

She grabbed hold of the blade where didn't have a physical sword under it.

“Tsk, tsk..... It's impossible to do a proper surprise attack when you swing around such a noisy thing, ya know? I won't say its cowardly to attack from

behind, but don't you have any other ideas?"

While she lectured me and chuckled, my attention was focused on the hand she held the sword with.

"May I ask how you're holding the Holy Thunder Sword?"

The actual blade was still underneath the electricity of course, but she'd catch a section of the sword without a physical base, something that should have been impossible, yet not only had she done it, it didn't seem like the electricity affected her.

Wait, there was a thin layer of light wrapped around her body, could it.....?

Once I managed to stop her movement, I could clearly examine her.

"It's easy for a dragon king's scales to be damaged on their own. Their true value is the ability to infuse them with spirit magic in order to strengthen them against magic attacks."

The moment she started chuckled again, her tail was raised and the crystal sword attacked me.

I tried to pull my sword out of her hand, but when I focused my attention on that point, the electricity in that localized area was suddenly amplified and her hand was repelled.

"Haa!?"

Ferufivisurotte was caught off guard by this, and both of us retreated in response to the unexpected occurrence, giving me the opening I needed to deflect her crystal-tipped tail with my sword.

The collision of our blades sent out a high-pitched scream while the two of us glared at each other.

Her ability to hold the lighting blade proved that magic alone was incapable of reaching her body.

A dragon king fully clad in that thin, shining light was capable of negating

magic attacks with relative ease, practically making her immune to physical attacks and magic.

If all of my attacks were ineffective then I had no chance of victory.....

However, her previous reaction..... could I have betrayed her expectations?

However, there weren't a lot of methods that could capitalize on that hope.

Up until now I'd emphasized repressing magical power as much as possible, and that behavior seemed to have stuck.

Magic was harder to control in this world because, unlike in the game, the strength of a spell could be altered.

If I lost control of a spell, the magic could get out of control and damage what I didn't intend to.

That's why I used my free time in Raratoia to refine my control over my magic.

However, with that shield of light, I couldn't pierce her ironclad defenses.

I needed a surefire killing blow.....

Throwing down my shield, I grasped my sword with both hands, and raised it against my enemy.

"Come forth, keeper of eternity! Aion!"

When I invoked the summoning magic, a huge magic formation composed of moving clockwork began to shine at my feet.

A giant snake with the head of a lion emerged from that formation.

The lion snake slowly coiled itself around my feet and began to crawl up my body in a spiral pattern.

Ferufivisurotte intently watched the spectacle before her.

In an actual fight, there would be no meaning in this, but one had to

demonstrate their techniques in order to entertain an audience.

When the lion's head reached my shoulder it revealed its shape fangs and bit into my neck, simultaneously turning into a strange pattern that fused into my armor, wrapping my body in a cascade of different colored lights.

For the next three minutes, my state of being would be frozen..... it was a single summon but its mana cost was incredibly high, and its active time was short. Though the cost-effectiveness was horrible, in reality, it was an useful ability that briefly made one invincible.

Thanks to AionI wouldn't have to worry about blocking her attacks one by one.

And.....

“Sacred Lightning Sword!”

The blade was overwhelmed by the sparking energy, as I poured more mana into it than normal, and tried concentrating the power into one point.

Before the sword began to extend, I interrupted the flow of magic and kept the blade contained to its original size.

“Haaaaaaaaaa!!”

As I stared at the lighting-clad sword, I recalled the techniques I'd used during my rampage following Executioner Michael's descent the other day.

One of the techniques she used, Executioner's Crimson Sword of Fire: Rubrum Flamma, was a flaming sword with overwhelming power, yet it was a power she could easily control.

I drew upon the feelings from that time and somehow managed to control the large amount of power that I was outputting..... it was difficult to explain this conflicting sensation.

The lighting-clad sword had settled down, but it was difficult to maintain its current state.....

“Okay, let’s go!”

With a spirited shout, I grasped my sword with both hands and charged her.



I didn't even have the capacity to use transfer magic at the moment.

A pleased smile was flowing over Ferufivisurotte's face when she saw what I was doing and started to create photospheres in far greater numbers than she did before while simultaneously directing them towards me.

I changed headlong into the storm of innumerable meteors without any defense.

The spherical bullets had the same power as before and exploded on contact, evaporating the ground around me.

Even when the spheres scored a direct hit, Aion's barrier completely repelled them, but I couldn't see through the dust clouds the explosions created.

“Wooooooooooooooooooooooo !!!”

I let out a war cry to rid myself of my fears and continued to charge forward.

When another sphere appeared out of the dust cloud it grazed my head and exploded, knocking my helmet off.

Aion's effects had run out.

It took some time to get the Holy Thunder Sword under control, and there had been very little time remaining.

If the next sphere hit its mark I wouldn't be able to stop it..... the dust cleared and I was greeted with Ferufivisurotte's gruesome laughter.

Her crystal-tipped tail moved faster than the eye could see as the two of us clashed.....

“Ugh.....”

I felt the blood leaving my body as her crystal sword dug into my neck, but it was merely a non-fatal flesh wound.

As for the Holy Thunder Sword, I'd managed keep hold of it even though the lighting had faded, the blade was deeply embedded in her abdomen and

Ferufivisurotte was bleeding profusely.

Of course, the spectators held their breath and were left in a state of awe as they watched.

I unintentionally let go of my sword and stared at my trembling blood-stained hands.

Ferufivisurotte head hung down as she collapsed to her knees.

“Arc!! What are you doing?! Use healing magic!! Hurry!!”

A familiar voice managed to break through my blank mind.

When I turned towards its source I saw Ariane desperately yelling at me, so when I came to my senses I rushed to Ferufivisurotte’s side.

However, one moment ago Ferufivisurotte had been unmoving on the spot she’d fallen, but the next she effortlessly pulled the Holy Thunder Sword out of her own chest and swung it at me.

Gaaain!

Unable to dodge the sword that suddenly came flying at me, I was hit in the face without my helmet and fell on my back.

Because I had drunk the hot spring water from the Dragon King’s tree before this bout of entertainment, blood started to flow from my nose after I was hit in the face.

I still didn’t understand what happened until I raised my head, and saw the Holy Thunder Sword over her shoulder and her pointing a finger-gun towards me.

“Is that an opening?”

“!?”

I confusedly stared at her abdomen..... the Holy Thunder Sword had just been embedded in her chest, but there wasn’t even a blemish across her navel.

.....what the hell is this?”

I somehow managed to sit up while holding my aching nose.

She had a mischievous smile she began patting her stomach.

“A dragon king’s humanoid form is very special. An injury like that was nothing serious. The details are secret, but why do you think we don’t imitate humans completely?”

She started to laugh again when I started to question whether or not dragon kings were immortal.

“I can tell you that I’m not immortal.”

I shivered when she answered the question as if she were reading my mind.

“Well, I enjoyed this enough, let’s bring an end to this entertainment.”

She thrust the Holy Thunder Sword into the ground when she said that and turned her attention to chief Brain.

“Well then, let’s talk about the coming war!!”

When Brian nodded his head at her remark the ten great elders stood up.

“Everyone, we will be taking part in the largest war since Canada’s founding! It will be a battle to protect your countryman, neighbors and villages!”

Brian enthusiastically began speaking the crowd of people gathered in the spectator section of the arena.

For the time being, my role of securing the important war potential had been fulfilled, so I laid on the ground and sighed after casting healing magic on my nose.

“Hm, I’m really tired today.....”

I looked up at the clear blue sky above the arena as I grumbled.

Epilogue

On a certain day, an invention that rocked the entire world was announced.

Parietal Association Cortex Connection Terminal.

The innovative technology, dubbed PACC by the populace, included the neuronal access terminal.

Until the system had been announced, the technology was thought to be in the far-off future, but a Canadian company gathered the most talented american engineers to develop it.

With this technology, after the module was embedded in the back of someone's head through a simple surgery, the external PACC could be connected and create a pseudo-space that could immediately reproduce images and videos in the brain.

The created pseudo-space was connected to one's senses through the parietal association field, recreating the five senses in one's brain, letting what was experienced in this space mirror reality.

The various ethical and theological concerns were pointed out shortly after the PACC's announcement.

However, the technology was eventually utilized in a multitude of fields.

Providing a life-like bodily sensation, it was mostly used to provide occupational training for various careers.

Even astronauts used it for extravehicular and crisis evasion training.

The pseudo-space had the training programs built in, with the missions mimicking real life, allowing high precision training since accidents wouldn't result in death.

Firefighters and policemen could run emergency drills with ease and even

athletes could improve their form. Though it took repetition for the brain to accept ideas without experiencing them with their bodies, the skills cultivated with the PACC were honed to a remarkable degree above traditional methods.

The percentage of soldiers diagnosed with PTSD had also been reduced, as basic training was conducted on pseudo-battlefield where the sensation of pain was set to its lowest degree. Soldiers that received training through the PACC fulfilled their duty without being subjected to excessive battlefield stresses.

However, traditionally trained soldiers saw those who were not afraid to die on the battlefield as strange, and multiple governments were condemned for creating brainwashed soldiers.

The PACC trained soldiers themselves praised the system, but the fervor in which they defended the training eventually resulted in a large controversy between PACC abolitionists and supporters.

As a result, the use of PACC was globally restricted, but it was impossible for the innovative field of research to stagnant.

The International Organization of Standardization was formed to regulate PACC..... While the ISO had it's problems it slowly began to show signs of progress.

However, the same year the ISO was formed, the Canadian company that developed the PACC revealed a new system.

Spirit and Time Room System.

Avid manga readers eagerly awaited the STR system, specifically, because of its ability to alter the flow of time one experienced within the STR.

In other words, it was possible to create a situation in which one could spend three hours in the pseudo-space created by the STR and exit it to find that only an hour had passed.

It was technology right out of a dream, so naturally, career training and learning speeds drastically improved once again.

Due to the strain the time compression placed on the brain, it was kept to a 3:1

ratio.

The PACC terminals spread from specialized fields into more general ones.

One of those fields was the gaming industry.

Because of the required module implant, only those who were eighteen years old, or older, were allowed to use the PACC. However, the draw of experiencing next-generation VR was enough to generate a sufficient demand for it.

And there was a man who was crazy about next-gen VR using the PACC.

Still, the PACC equipment and materials were rather expensive, even with its spread into the general market, the operation cost as much as a new car.

One of the major factors that hindered the market was that insurance didn't cover the PACC module operation.

The obsessed man also believed that it was more of a luxury item rather than a requirement for a healthy body.

In the first place, that man took a crowded train to work every day, received a meager paycheck and lived in a narrow apartment.

For a person that lived this kind of life, stories and information about the system filled every nook and cranny of his mind.

That's why, when a PACC game was recruiting beta testers, he didn't hesitate and applied immediately.

The game's development had been started by a European PACC distributor and the VR project was later contracted to a game studio affiliated with them.

The game was a fantasy MMORPG in which the player became the demon king, expanded their territory by building their army and invading the territories of other players.

Although the demon king system had still been in beta and there only a hand full of testers, the players could choose to make their demon king an elf, human, or even a goblin.

The man set his demon king up as a former human who assembled an undead army and used the humans living in his territory as materials for his undead.

For the next month the man repeatedly played the game like that and thoroughly enjoyed being on the cutting edge of technological advancement.

Other beta testers felt that the death animations in the game were too realistic and asked that they were simplified, but the man adamantly argued against their suggestion, as he felt doing so would detract from the first PACC game.

The game was the closest to mirroring the reality, and the man couldn't endure the boredom of having the game reverted to a less immersive build.

Since his character had been a magic user, he hadn't felt repulsion at killing something, even if that something was human.

No matter how real the world looked like, it was still fake..... that's what the man thought anyway.

And then that day came.

After eating out like usual the man returned to his apartment, connected to his PACC terminal and started up the game.

The man laid down on his bed, closed his eyes and listen to the quiet tone of the system starting up.

On that day, the man in the apartment vanished.....

A person who had been lying motionlessly on his bed suddenly began to stir.

He wore luxurious canonical robes and a large hat that had Hiruku's holy symbols sewn into it.

The rim of the hat was connected to a thick veil that was almost impossible to see through.

The man had been dreaming of the past while he'd sleep. The man made a specific hand movement in the air as he started thinking about the other affairs.

However, the screen that he'd hoped to appear didn't.

Logout..... it'd been quite some time since he'd last seen that game screen.

Nearly a hundred years had passed since then.

The man believed that some kind of malfunction had occurred with the STR.

He'd spent an entire lifetime in this game and still had no idea how much time had passed since then..... however, why weren't there any uneasy feelings?

If ten days had passed in the real world, his real body should have died by now. That line of logic was what had convinced the man of his continued safety in the real world.

The man rose from his bed and took a look outside his window.

He'd made the Mt. Arthus cathedral in the Hiruku Theocracy his base quite some time ago.

The man's name was Thanatos Shirubiwes Hiruku.....

He was the Pope who reigned over the Hiruku Theocracy.

The Pope noticed something all of a sudden.

"One of my followers has fallen..... again."

The Pope let out that utterance before a depth laugh began to leak from behind his veil.

In the game, even an NPC was able to defeat the low-level, mass-produced skeleton knights

However, an NPC capable of killing his direct followers didn't exist.

According to mechanisms of the game, only another player should be capable of doing that..... In other words, a player would be coming soon.

Could they get in touch with the outside.....? Or were they a victim of the same malfunction?

In any case, playing the same game for a hundred years was bound to grow tedious.

At first, in order to kill time, he had protected the human countries, in an ironic kind of game. If the country died, he simply turned all of the populace into undead, and recently he'd finally built up enough forces to launch a large-scale invasion.

Honestly, he could have launched the invasion a while ago, but for a time, doing the monotonous work of preparing the invasion strangely felt good.

Perhaps I can finally meet a comrade..... those feelings were growing within him, but they had already destroyed his carefully crafted followers and declared war.

It wasn't too late to play the game a little bit longer.

Pope Thanatos began to laugh as he contently watched over the territory he'd built.

The majestic Arthus Cathedral sat atop a mountainous hill..... a strong wind, peculiar to this area, blow through the window and blew on Pope Thanatos's veil.

Pope Thanatos didn't have any expression or a face for that matter.

There was only a human skull with two red lights floating within its dark eye sockets.

It was impossible to grasp any type of expression from the skull, but a deep laughter could be heard from his clattering mouth, that eerie sound echoed throughout the mountain range.